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LETTERS

TO

REV. NATHANIEL W. TAYLOR, D. D.

BY LEONARD WOODS, D. D.



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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit:

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JOHN W. DAVIS, { *Clerk of the District
of Massachusetts.*

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LETTER I.

Proper manner of conducting theological discussion.—Duty and danger of theological Professors.—Philosophy of religion made too prominent. Its hurtful effects appear from the history of the church. Importance of conforming exactly to the word of God.—Apology for taking a part in this controversy. How the views here controverted may have been occasioned.—Plan of remarking.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I entirely agree with you in considering free discussion on the subject of religion to be of great importance to the cause of divine truth. It is obvious, however, that discussion on such a subject cannot be expected to produce its proper effects, unless it is prompted by a right spirit, and conducted in a right manner. It behooves us, therefore, to inquire very carefully, what is that spirit, and that manner, in which free discussion should be conducted? In answering this inquiry, we may be essentially aided by many passages of Scripture, and particularly by the following direction of St. Paul, who, as we well know, was far from being deficient either in warmth of natural temper, or in Christian decision. "The servant of the Lord," he says, "must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Even towards those who are hostile to religion, the Apostle requires that such a disposition and conduct should be exhibited. Now if all men,—if even those who wage war against Christianity, are nevertheless entitled to a treatment from us, marked with meekness and gentleness; surely these virtues ought to be exercised in all their strength and loveliness towards those who, notwithstanding some differences of opinion, are united with us in the bonds of fraternal affection, and devoted to the same benevolent cause.

My present design, I am well aware, is attended with circumstances of peculiar delicacy. I have undertaken to address myself to a respected and beloved Brother, from whom I am constrained to differ,—a Brother invested with the same sacred office with myself, both as a minister of the gospel, and a Professor of Christian Theology. And I cannot but notice the circumstance also, that this is no common case; as there has been in our country scarcely an instance, before the present, in which a teacher of Christian Theology in an orthodox Institution has come before the public in his own name, to controvert the opinions of another man placed in a similar station. This circumstance, I confess, makes a touching appeal to my feelings, and excites in me a desire which words cannot fully express, that every thing relative to the manner of the present discussion may be unexceptionable. It cannot be thought improbable that, among the Professors of our numerous Seminaries, there will, from time to time, be differences of opinion, more or less important, and that these differences will be made the subject of free investigation. Now, my Dear Brother, as we have been led to think it our duty to engage in the difficult, and shall I say, perilous business of publicly discussing controverted points; let us consider well what is before us, and guard with sacred care against every thing which would render our example unworthy of imitation, or in any way injure the great interests which we wish to advance. Who can count up the evils which might result to the cause of Christ, if our manner of treating controverted subjects should in any respects be such, as would tend to promote in others around us, and especially in our pupils, feelings of unkindness and acrimony? On the contrary, may we not hope that important good will result from our example, if, whenever we engage in discussing such subjects, under all the excitements and provocations attending public debate, we may be enabled by divine grace, to copy the meekness and gentleness of Christ? When I dwell on such reflections as these, I cannot avoid the persuasion, that I should commit a less offence against the Christian religion by *bad reasoning*, than by a *bad spirit*; and therefore that I am bound to take as much pains at least, to cherish right *feelings*, as to frame right *arguments*. But a Christian disposition pervading our writings is not only required by the spirit of our religion, but is necessary to the success of our cause; since, without it, our opinions and arguments, especially

those which we may regard as improvements, will not be likely to pass easily and pleasantly into the minds of others ; as we may have frequently found by our own experience.

It will undoubtedly be a question with some good men, whether it can in any circumstances conduce to the welfare of the church, for Christian ministers, and especially for Professors in our Theological Seminaries, to enlist in a public discussion of the topics on which they differ. And I readily acknowledge that controversy, or even the appearance of controversy among Theological Professors, is likely to be attended with peculiar danger, as the feelings of their pupils, and the vital interests of their respective Institutions, must be so much involved. On this account, I have felt a strong reluctance to take any part in the examination of those peculiar opinions which you have exhibited before the public. But after all, is there any sufficient reason why we should be deprived of the right, or rather, exempt from the duty, of bearing testimony against the errors of the day, and especially against whatever we may consider erroneous in one another ? Is it not a matter of special propriety that we should hold ourselves responsible, in a sense, to each other, and to all devout Christians in the community ? Is there any thing in our situation or employment, which can free us from this responsibility ? Nay, is it not true that we are peculiarly responsible ? And is it not true also that we are, in some respects, peculiarly liable to error ? Now if at any time we are betrayed into wrong opinions ; especially if we make those opinions public ; can we expect to escape animadversion ? Can we justly desire to escape ? I well know what noble sentiments you have expressed in relation to this subject, and how often you have invited your brethren to a thorough and unsparing examination of your opinions. And I trust you will now join with me in saying ; *Let the Christian community watch over our Theological Seminaries with an ever wakeful eye. Let these Seminaries extend a kind but faithful inspection over one another. Let no deviation from sound doctrine pass unnoticed. If any of those who are appointed to give instruction to the rising ministry, show the least signs of error ;—if they only begin to indulge in modes of interpreting the word of God, or in modes of reasoning on moral or metaphysical subjects, which have an unfavorable, or even doubtful tendency in regard to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity ; let all the teachers of religion in our Churches, Col-*

leges and Seminaries be awake to the danger. It is far better for the cause of divine truth that this general wakefulness to danger should rise to an extreme,—better that solicitude, and fear, and even jealousy should be excited, than that those who are appointed to stand as Zion's watchmen, should slumber on their posts.

I cannot but feel that every public teacher of religion needs the vigilant inspection of his brethren. Indeed, where is the pious minister of Christ who has not this feeling in regard to himself, and who does not find reason for it in his own experience? And where is the intelligent Christian, who has not at times detected in himself the commencement of such habits of thinking, as might lead on to wide departures from the truth as it is in Jesus? The darkness of the human mind, and the strength of unholy passion is such, even in real Christians, and the causes of error are so various and powerful, and some of them so latent, that it can never be deemed safe to trust the interests of religion implicitly in the hands of any man. No fertility of genius; no extent of learning; no metaphysical acumen; and no degree of piety, as it exists in the present world, can be relied upon as affording full security. Formerly, when I turned my thoughts towards particular ministers of the gospel, and particular Christians, I was ready to think it impossible, that they should ever abandon any of the truths of revelation, or embrace any hurtful error. But what I have seen of the human mind during more than thirty years in the ministry, and more than twenty in my present office, has led me to entertain other views on this subject, and has impressed my mind with a serious conviction, that there is no teacher of religion in our churches, or in our Seminaries, no, not one, who can think himself free from the danger of error, or who has not reason to apprehend that a deceived heart may turn him aside. And if, in these days of adventurous speculation, any of those, who are called by divine providence to instruct in our theological schools, should wholly, or in part renounce the doctrines of revelation, and become advocates of error; it would only be a repetition of what has often occurred in past ages.

Suffer me now to offer a few suggestions as to the proper use of these remarks.

If every man, however learned and pious, however important or sacred his station, and however many safeguards may be placed around him, is in fact liable to error; then surely we ought to be

aware of this, and to offer up fervent prayer to God, that he would give us a sound mind, and guide us into all the truth. We ought also to crave it as a privilege, that our Christian brethren would watch over us, and by their fraternal freedom, and their admonition, when necessary, and especially by their prayers, would help to secure us against the wrong tendencies of our minds, and to establish our hearts in divine truth.

Our acknowledged liability to error should lead us to check all undue confidence in our own opinions, and to hold ourselves ready to be instructed and corrected by others. It is no very uncommon thing for a man to manifest such reliance upon the strength of his own mind, and the correctness of his own reasoning, as clearly implies, though he may be unwilling to avow it in words, that he thinks himself infallible; at least, that he thinks himself much nearer to a state of infallibility, than others. Let us keep ourselves at a great distance from every thing like this; and in all our reasonings, especially if we ever venture on ground which lies beyond the range of common belief and common investigation, let us proceed with slow and cautious steps. And if at any time the friends of Christ, apprehending that we have begun to wander from the right way, suddenly raise the cry of alarm; instead of complaining of their want of confidence in us, or indulging any suspicions as to the motives which govern them; we ought to bless God that he has given them a heart to feel so lively an interest in the cause of truth, and to take so quick an alarm at the sight, or even the apprehension of danger. We ought moreover to keep in mind, that however strong our persuasion may be that our present views are right, and the views of those who differ from us, wrong; a little more time; more careful and patient inquiry; a farther exercise of a modest, humble, and pious temper; and a higher degree of divine teaching, may alter our convictions, and may show us that we have been standing on slippery places.

After the remarks, which I have now made, and which I cannot but consider to be of special importance to those who are concerned in preparing young men for the ministry; I shall proceed to my particular object, which is, to express to you some of the doubts and difficulties which I feel respecting your recent publications. Allow me then to lay aside all hesitation and reserve, and to give utterance to my thoughts just as they arise in my own mind.

I shall, in the first place, take the liberty to make a few remarks as to the general aspect and tendency of what you have published. I refer particularly to your *Concio ad Clerum*, and to the several numbers in the *Christian Spectator*, which are understood to come from your pen, on the means of regeneration.

Though the design of these letters does not require me to remark with the same freedom on what is excellent in your publications, as on what I deem faulty ; yet my esteem for you and my regard to justice require me to say, that I have been gratified in no common degree with the clear and impressive illustrations you give of various important truths, and with the powerful and conclusive arguments which you urge in their support. And I would hope that the friends of evangelical truth and the friends of free inquiry generally, will not overlook what is valuable in the productions of your pen, because on some important points they are constrained to dissent from you. I take pleasure also in acknowledging, that I have derived real benefit from the free discussion of subjects in the private correspondence I have recently had with you.

In regard to the general aspect of your publications ; I have serious doubts, whether the prominence which you give to what is called *the philosophy of the Christian religion*, is adapted to promote the interests of the church.

I know not that I differ from you as to what constitutes *the philosophy of religion*. I understand by it something which is aside from the simple doctrines and facts which are set forth in the Scriptures ; something which may be omitted without detracting any thing from the doctrines or facts themselves, or from their practical influence. It is that view of the subjects of revelation, which is suited to gratify the love of abstruse, metaphysical speculation, or what may be called, *the curiosity of intellect*. If a single example will be of use, I would refer to 1 Cor. 15. The Apostle affirms the simple, momentous truth, that men will be raised from the dead by the power of God. The objector inquires, "*How* are the dead raised up ?" He was looking after the *philosophy* of the doctrine. He wished to understand the *manner*,—the *quomodo*. The Apostle rebuked him for such a question, though he took occasion from it to give important instruction. Locke and the Bishop of Worcester went into a formal investigation of the doctrine of the resurrection, and furnished a very striking specimen of free discussion on the philosophy of a Christian doctrine.

I could illustrate the meaning I give to the phrase by another example. The Scriptures teach that it is the influence of the divine Spirit and that alone, which sanctifies the heart. Now if a man attempts to explain metaphysically the *manner* in which the Spirit operates upon the mind, and how his influence is consistent with our accountableness, and with the laws of our intellectual and moral nature; he enters on the philosophy of the doctrine of regeneration;—the very thing which our Saviour seems to have discouraged in his conversation with Nicodemus. If I were to select one of the most striking instances of dwelling on the philosophy of Christian doctrines, I should fix upon some parts of your *Concio ad Clerum*, and of the other publications of yours above referred to. It may in many cases be difficult to draw the line exactly between a Christian doctrine itself, and the philosophy of that doctrine. But that there is a difference between the one and the other is a fact, which you yourself have been forward to affirm as of essential consequence.

I have one more remark by way of explanation; namely, that there is a wide difference in point of clearness and importance between what would be called the philosophy of evangelical doctrines in one case, and in another. In one case, the investigation may relate to facts in man's intelligent and moral nature, or to principles in the divine government, which are certain and obvious. In another case, it may relate to what is uncertain, conjectural, or obscure;—in a word, to what lies beyond the limits of our intelligence. I consider Edwards's metaphysical treatises to be, generally, of the former character. And it would be easy to name various works, both ancient and modern, which are of the latter character. Between these two modes of philosophizing, there is a vast difference in respect to utility.

You will perceive from these remarks, that I would not by any means indiscriminately proscribe every form and degree of philosophical investigation on the subjects of religion. I readily allow that such investigation, particularly of the former character above named, may, if rightly directed, and kept in its proper place, be of real use to ministers, and especially to Theological Professors, and may enable them to attain to more profound and consistent views of the doctrines of Christianity, and to illustrate those doctrines more clearly, and defend them more ably and successfully, than they could without it. But every man who applies himself with ardor to

the philosophical investigation of Christian doctrines, will probably find it more difficult than he was previously aware of, to confine himself to that investigation which is of the right kind, to give it a right direction, and to keep it in its proper place. He will constantly be in danger of carrying it to an extreme ; and of forming such a habit of mind, that the most essential truths, if stated simply in a scriptural manner, will have no power to give him pleasure. Who that is fond of contemplating the doctrines of religion metaphysically, has not frequently been conscious of a tendency to this faulty habit of mind ? If I mistake not, the circumstances of the present day, particularly the opposition made against the doctrines of revelation on the ground of philosophy, expose us to this danger in a more than ordinary degree. We may deem it a sacred duty to meet our opponents on the ground which they have chosen. And while performing this duty, we may, as a natural consequence, fall into a philosophical manner of thinking, and a philosophical manner of stating and defending the doctrines of the Bible. And we may come at length to make philosophy the main business of the pulpit, both on ordinary, and on special occasions. Now should this in any measure prevail, it would, certainly prove a calamity to the souls of men. Just as it would be a calamity to persons, who came hungry to a feast to which they were invited, if instead of receiving wholesome food, they should be entertained with a philosophical discourse from the master of the house on the chemical properties of food, or on the theory of digestion. Should the practice I have named prevail generally, and should there be a reign of *metaphysical* instead of *scriptural* Theology ; of a truth famine and desolation would spread through the churches of the land.

A minister of distinguished excellence in Connecticut told me, near the close of his sacred work, that during the first years of his ministry, he was in the practice of preaching *metaphysically*. At length he was led to make some particular inquiry as to the usefulness of his public instructions. To his surprise and grief he was informed, that his preaching was universally unintelligible and unprofitable, both to the old and the young. He therefore determined that henceforth he would confine metaphysical investigation to his study, and would make it his object to *preach the gospel of Christ*. This determination, and a correspondent practice, was followed by the most happy consequences.

He who spake as never man spake, has given us a perfect pattern of the manner in which he would have us inculcate and defend the truths of his gospel. And to this is added the example of his apostles. Now if Christ and his apostles had deemed the philosophy of religion of any special consequence, they certainly would have suggested this to us. But did they suggest it? Did they recommend what I call the philosophy of Christian doctrines, as holding a place among the means to be employed for the salvation of men? Instead of recommending it, did they not, in several instances, directly discountenance it? If then the ministers of religion at the present day should cease to receive the simplicity of divine truth, just as it is exhibited in the Bible, or cease to love it and be satisfied with it, and, in their public and private instructions, should give Christianity a *metaphysical*, instead of a *scriptural* aspect; would they not show that they had forgotten the example of their Lord and Master, and of his inspired Apostles? And as the consequence of this, should we not witness a decay of vital piety, and a dark and ominous cloud spreading over the churches of Christ?

Whitfield preached the truth with uncommon simplicity and directness, and kept at the greatest distance from philosophical discussion; and with what unparalleled success is well known to the world. It is indeed true that some very impressive and successful ministers have much to do with the philosophy of Christianity. But in my opinion, this circumstance detracts greatly from the degree of their usefulness. If we could consult the sober experience of the most devout Christians, we should be satisfied that the success of ministers is, under God, owing to the simple truths of the Bible which they preach, and to the spirit of benevolence and piety which they manifest. Whatever they introduce into their ministrations which is abstruse, or metaphysical, or directly polemic in its nature, is generally very unwelcome to the hearts of those who are spiritually minded, and proves a serious hindrance to their growth in grace. Many a Christian, I doubt not, complains to God in secret, that although he is blessed with an able and orthodox minister, he is so seldom fed with "the sincere milk of the word." And would it not be well for us, and for other ministers, to inquire, whether this has not been the case with some active, devout Christians, who have been placed under our ministry?

Here, my Brother, we see our high responsibility in relation to

the particular work which divine providence has assigned to us. It is a responsibility which may well make us tremble, and which should excite in us an unremitting watchfulness against whatever would injure the piety or usefulness of the rising ministry. God requires us to train up those, whose studies we are called to superintend, to be preachers, not of *philosophy* or *metaphysics*, but of the GOSPEL. And in doing this, our chief business must be to teach them the truth in all its scriptural plainness and purity, making the word of God our standard both as to the *matter* and *manner* of our instructions. If this is neglected, whatever else is done, our Seminaries will certainly fail of accomplishing the great object for which they were founded. If our love for the Bible, or for divine truth as set forth in the Bible, declines; if we begin to think that Christianity must be invested with the costume of philosophy; especially, if we begin to take more interest in this philosophical costume, than in Christianity itself; there will be inevitable loss and injury to that precious cause which it is our first duty to promote; the God of Zion will be offended; and it will soon be said of our sacred Seminaries, if not of ministers and churches,—*the glory is departed*.

. Suppose we had good reason to expect, that at the close of each Academic year, the Blessed Jesus would travel through the land, as he travelled through Judea and Galilee eighteen hundred years ago, and would visit each of those Seminaries which have been consecrated to him. What influence would such an expectation have upon our feelings and conduct? Would it not in all probability occasion some visible changes in the direction of our studies, in the use of our pens, in our instructions, and in our prayers? Amid our high and holy efforts to prepare ourselves and our pupils for such a Visitant, would not some of the investigations which we so fondly pursue, and some of the opinions, for which we are apt so warmly to contend, lose their hold upon our minds? And would not some other things which we are prone to overlook, quickly rise to infinite importance in our view?

The supposition I have made, is one of very serious import. But all which is implied in it, and much more, is, virtually, a reality. For the Blessed Saviour, instead of visiting us once in a year, is in spirit continually present with us; and continually says to us, "I am he who searcheth the reins and the hearts." All that we do in study and conversation, all that we teach, and all that we

write, is under his eye. Oh ! then, what vigilance and zeal should we exercise in taking care of the precious interests which he has committed to our trust ! With what pious docility and diligence should we endeavour to know the mind of God in his word ! And how earnestly should we prosecute the great business of preparing our pupils to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ ! When I dwell on these reflections, I become conscious that I have bestowed too much time and attention on some subjects of speculation, which have little or no connexion with the spiritual interests of Christ's kingdom. And let me inquire, whether the circumstances in which you have been placed have never betrayed you into the same mistake ; and in particular, whether you have never been led to attach too much importance to the mere philosophy of religion ? It is my sincere opinion that you have. Even if your philosophical views were all unexceptionable in the matter of them ; it would, I think, be evident, that you have assigned them too high a place. And although the essential doctrines of the Gospel may continue, amid your boldest speculations, to maintain a commanding influence over your own mind ; this I fear will not be the case generally with those, who shall adopt your philosophical mode of thinking and speaking on the subjects of religion. They will be likely either to hold the peculiar doctrines of the gospel loosely, or indistinctly ; or to pass over them as comparatively unimportant ; or to explain and defend them merely on philosophical principles. Those who do the last of these must, to be consistent, practically adopt the maxim, that the meaning of Scripture must bend to their philosophy, and not their philosophy to Scripture. And thus they will cease to make the Bible the only and sufficient rule of their faith ; and by whatever name they may call themselves, or their metaphysical theories, they will not in the end be far from the confines of infidelity.

There is still another evil to be apprehended. Is it not probable that the practice, to which you have given the sanction of your example, of laying out so much zeal on the philosophy of religion, will occasion unhappy differences and dissensions among those who have heretofore been of one mind as to the doctrines of the gospel ? The Apostle Paul would have ministers *charged before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit* ; and he shows a decided disapprobation of those who *dote about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy and strife*. Who will assert that the

instructions and precepts of the Apostle in regard to this subject are in no sense applicable to ministers at this day? Could the Apostle be now personally present with us, are we sure that he would not charge us to cease contending about words to no profit, and to desist from questions and discussions which gender strife among the friends of Christ, instead of promoting godly edifying? To give prominence to abstruse, metaphysical speculation, is the direct and certain way to foster division. Good men may agree, and substantially do agree, so far as the essential principles of Christianity are concerned. But as to the philosophy of religion, there is no prospect of their being agreed. Now it is certainly of vast moment at the present day, that the friends of evangelical religion should be of one mind and one heart in opposing the common enemy, and in endeavouring to advance the essential interests of Christ's kingdom. With these great interests in view, who of us can be inclined to agitate subjects, which are of such a nature, and which lead so far beyond the common bounds of thought, that neither ministers nor Christians can be expected to come to an agreement respecting them? Especially, who can think it adviseable or safe to do this, when the disagreement which will thus be produced in regard to things of little value, will be likely, according to the known principles of human nature, gradually to extend its influence to things of greater value, and ultimately to show itself in relation to the fundamental doctrines of the Bible? However praiseworthy the motives which may have influenced you in your late publications; I apprehend that the nature of some of the discussions you have introduced, and your mode of conducting them, are suited to occasion the evils above hinted at. Indeed have not those evils already begun to appear? And is there any way to check these evils, and to promote the peace and prosperity of the churches, but by refraining from abstruse and unprofitable speculations, and confining ourselves to the great business of understanding, obeying, and teaching God's holy word?

If we examine the history of the church of Christ in past ages, we shall find that a prevailing taste among the clergy for abstruse, metaphysical speculation, and the practice of mixing human philosophy with divine truth, has been a source of constant strife among the followers of Christ, and of endless mischief to the interests of his kingdom. When those who have stood foremost among the

ministers of Christ, and who have been possessed of distinguished powers of mind, have shown a dislike to the beaten track in which the excellent of the earth have walked, and a thirst for innovation or distinction ; especially, when they have had a spirit to defy resistance, and to press on, reckless of consequences ; then have the churches been torn asunder by the violence of strife ; then has Christianity itself been wounded by the disputes and contentions of its teachers and its friends. And ought we not, with great humility and fear, to remember the dreadful fact, that scarcely any pernicious error has ever prevailed in the Christian church, which did not originate with ministers of the gospel ?

These remarks are by no means intended to discountenance free inquiry, or to fetter theological investigation. My only wish is, to show the importance of conducting free inquiry and unfettered investigation on right principles, and of forming a habit of thinking soberly and justly on the subjects of religion. And it has become a leading principle with me, that to think soberly and justly on the subjects of religion, is to conform exactly to the inspired writers,—to go as far as they go, and no farther. Now the philosophical speculations, on which you have bestowed the greatest zeal, and which contain the points of difference between you and your brethren, are speculations which manifestly lead beyond the instructions of the Bible. You yourself consider them as distinct from “ the fundamental doctrines of the gospel ;” and while you differ from most orthodox ministers in New England in regard to these speculations, it seems you are “ not aware of any departure in any article of doctrinal belief,” from what they commonly hold. For it is well known that they commonly hold the doctrines of the gospel, as these are stated by your revered Instructor, Dr. Dwight, and with whom you also profess to agree in every article of doctrinal belief. The subjects of disagreement, then, you yourself consider to be aside from the doctrines of the Gospel, and additional to them, relating chiefly to the mode of stating and explaining them. And yet does not the degree of zeal which you expend on these subjects naturally imply, that they are in your view more important, than those doctrines of the Gospel in which you agree with others ?

After expressing to you so frankly and decidedly how little importance comparatively I attach to the mere philosophy of religion, and how many evils will in my view be occasioned by giving a phi-

losophical aspect to the doctrines of revelation, especially in discourses intended for popular instruction ; I may perhaps be charged with inconsistency, when I proceed, according to my present design, to a discussion of some of the most abstruse, metaphysical subjects, which ever employed the pens or the thoughts of men. But I have the plea of necessity. For I am persuaded not only that you have made your philosophical speculations too prominent, but that your speculations themselves are, in some important instances, very incorrect ; that your philosophy is not only excessive in degree, but erroneous in some of its principles. And as these erroneous principles have in my view, an unfavorable and dangerous tendency as to those doctrines of revelation to which they relate ; I cannot but deem it important, that they should be subjected to a fair examination. And this examination must require any one who undertakes it, to investigate those very philosophical questions which you have introduced. As to myself—I have been induced to take a part in this examination, because I have confidence in those distinguished servants of Christ, far and near, who have expressed their opinion, that it is a duty which I owe to the cause of truth. If I know my own heart, I undertake this work from a regard to that cause. And if, in the execution, I should be betrayed, as I may be, into the commission of any offence against the laws of Christian love, or Christian propriety ; I should consider it as a fault not to be excused, but as deserving faithful admonition from you, and humble confession from me.

Permit me to say, that I have often attempted to account for it, that you have come to entertain those philosophical opinions, against which I am now to object. And I have sometimes thought it possible these opinions may have arisen from the very circumstance above referred to, that you have bestowed upon them a disproportionate attention. It is indeed true in regard to most subjects, that they cannot be well understood without long and patient study, and that the want of this is a fruitful source of mistakes. But it is also a well known fact, that we are sometimes most liable to err in regard to a subject, on which we have expended the most intense study, and in which we have felt the most absorbing interest. This circumstance may have such an influence, as to disqualify us to judge correctly. I speak now of what every one who has been conversant with human affairs, must have noticed. We may pore over a

subject with so excessive an ardor, that our mental vision will become disordered. In such a case, a just opinion must be expected not from us, but from those who have given to the subject under consideration only such a degree of attention as its importance will justify, and who of course will be able to weigh it with an unbiased, unperturbed judgment.

But it may be after all, that your views are not what they are generally understood to be, and that I and others have been misled by what is peculiar in your manner of communicating your thoughts. There is unhappily a something, (I would not take upon me to say definitely what it is,) which makes it quite necessary for your readers generally to go over your pages again and again, and sometimes leaves them still in doubt whether they have arrived at your meaning. Now I love to cherish the hope, that when, by means of a more patient search, or by additional explanations from you, we shall come to apprehend clearly the sense of what you have written, just as it lies in your own mind; we shall be in a measure relieved of our difficulties. But as the case is, we must consider your opinions as they are exhibited in writing. We must interpret your language in the common way, having no liberty to conjecture that you may have any meaning or modification of meaning in your mind, except what you have intelligibly expressed.

In the very free animadversions which I am about to make, I shall not indulge myself in the too common practice of discoloring or exaggerating the opinions to be controverted; nor shall I allow myself, either from negligence or design, to mistake your meaning. But as I shall be liable to this, and well knowing that you have often felt it proper to complain of being misunderstood, and apprehending that you may be inclined, in the present case, to repeat this complaint; I have judged it best to adopt the following plan of remarking,—a plan which it is evident will be as just and candid to you, as safe for me.

Plan of remarking.

In respect to each of the subjects which I shall bring under discussion, I will carefully endeavour to ascertain what sentiments you have advanced. *These sentiments* I will make the subject of consideration. If I have imputed them to you without sufficient

reasons ; while I shall regret my mistake, I shall not consider this circumstance as detracting at all from the utility or necessity of the discussion. Because, though you may disclaim the sentiments thus examined, the arguments you employ, may lead some of your readers not only to suppose that you really entertain them, but also to adopt them as their own ; and thus may prove the means of diffusing error. Accordingly, I shall make it my chief object, not to prove the sentiments examined to be *yours*, but, whether yours or not, to prove them *incorrect*. Still I shall not neglect to advert to the reasons which have led me and others to suppose that such sentiments belong to you. On this plan, you will have a fair opportunity to correct any misapprehension of mine, or of your readers generally, in regard to your meaning ; while at the same time the evil consequences to the cause of truth, resulting from the general tenor of your arguments, as commonly understood, may in some measure be prevented.

LETTER II.

Passages in the Concio ad Clerum to be considered.—The two common positions. Reasons for supposing that Dr. Taylor holds the opposite. Interrogative form no objection.—Second position considered.—Meaning of the phrase, *God could not prevent sin*.—Three senses. Circumstances which indicate the literal sense.—Second sense adopted by the orthodox generally. Third sense inadmissible.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

My present design is to remark particularly on some passages in the pamphlet containing your “Concio ad Clerum,” delivered Sept. 10, 1828. The passages, to which my remarks will specially relate are contained in the fourth reflection of the Sermon, together with the note, pp. 29—34.

[See the Appendix at the close of the Letters, where the passages are inserted at large. For the sake of convenient reference, the different paragraphs are marked with the figures, 1, 2, 3, &c.]

Your reasoning in the place referred to is intended to obviate an objection against the character of God, arising from the fact, that he has given man a nature which he knew would lead him to sin. The position which you take in your reasoning I understand to be this; *that supposing God to have adopted a moral system, he could not have prevented all sin, nor the present degree of it*; or, as you sometimes represent it, *that God could not have done better on the whole, or better, if he gave existence at all, for any individual of the human race*. The conclusion is, *that no one can impeach the wisdom or goodness of God, considering, that notwithstanding the evil*

which exists, he will secure the greatest good possible for him to secure.

The positions exploded.

You say, the difficulties on this subject result in your view from "two very common, but groundless assumptions,—assumptions which, so long as they are admitted and reasoned upon, must," you think, "leave the subject involved in insuperable difficulties." The first of these assumptions is, "that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, and as such, so far as it exists, is preferable to holiness in its stead." The second is, "that God could in a moral system have prevented all sin, or at least the present degree of it."

Now from all you have advanced on the subject, I conclude that you mean to hold the *opposite positions*; namely, that sin is *not* the necessary means of the greatest good, and as such, so far as it exists, is *not* on the whole preferable to holiness in its stead; and that, in a moral system, God could *not* have prevented all sin, nor the present degree of it.

I am aware that you do not in so many words directly *affirm* these opposite positions. I am aware also, that the Reviewers of Taylor and Harvey, while professedly vindicating your views on the subject, say, "we have no wish to establish the contrary assumption. We pretend not to assert what was or was not possible with God. Our object has been to inquire whether men know as much respecting this subject as some have assumed to know." But whatever may have been the language of the Reviewers, I cannot think that this is the ground which you take in your sermon and note. It is no impossible supposition, that writers may, in a general expression or two, signify that they do not wish to establish a particular position; and yet clearly show by the whole current of their reasoning, that the establishment of that position is their favorite object. The reasons which lead me to think that you meant, indirectly indeed, but really and unhesitatingly, to maintain the two opposite positions above stated, I will now offer: though I must say, I should rejoice to learn, that your intention was not such as I have been led to suppose.

First. It is evident that you mean to *explode the two common positions* which you lay down at the beginning of your note. You call them "*groundless assumptions*;" and you think that, "so long

as they are admitted, they *must* leave the subject involved in insuperable difficulties." Besides this, it is manifestly your object throughout the note, to *confute* the common positions, and even to make them appear weak and contemptible. Now all this does not seem like merely *doubting* these positions, and merely *inquiring* whether the grounds on which they rest are sufficient, without asserting any thing one way or the other. I can hardly conceive how you could express your total rejection of them in a more unequivocal manner.

Second. As you *reject* the *common positions*, it is doubtless the case, that you *hold* the *opposite ones*. This I believe, because it would be unreasonable to suppose, that a man of your intellectual character had no opinion whatever, on a subject which he had studied so much; and because there is really no place where you can stand between rejecting what you call the common assumptions, and holding the opposite ones. You will find I think, on trial, that for a man of such decision as yours, it will be no easy matter to deny the opinions commonly received, without embracing the opposite. Indeed what middle place can there be between *denying* that moral evil *is* on the whole for the best, and *holding* that it is *not* on the whole for the best?—between *denying* that it *is* the necessary means of the greatest good, and *holding* that it is *not* the necessary means?—between *denying* that God *had* power in a moral system to prevent sin, and *holding* that he had *not* power to do it? No man who thinks regularly and connectedly, can deny the one of these, without holding the other. I must therefore conclude, that just so far as you deny and reject the common positions above named, you maintain the opposite ones.

But I have another reason for this conclusion; which is, that the main tenor of your arguments throughout shows, that the support of the opposite positions is as much your object, as the rejection of the common ones. The chief considerations you offer have as much weight in favor of these opposite positions, as against the common ones. If they *disprove* the position, that sin *is* the necessary means of the greatest good, they equally *prove*, that it is *not* the necessary means. There are indeed cases, in which a man may call in question the validity of the arguments which are used to support a particular proposition, and may be satisfied that they are wholly insufficient, without undertaking to defend, and even with-

out believing, any proposition which is opposed to it. But they are cases quite different from the one now in hand. And when such is the state of a man's mind, he will so direct his reasoning as to make it appear ; and will leave no room for others to think that, while he aims to confute the opinion which he calls groundless, it is equally his object to defend the opposite one.

It cannot surely be thought any objection against the construction which I have put upon your arguments, that they are expressed in the *interrogative* form. This form is not used in such a case to express doubt or indecision, but to give greater force to arguments. In your reasoning on the subject before us, you make a more frequent and more skilful use of interrogatives than is common. They occur continually ; and are manifestly adapted to produce a high rhetorical effect. I do not by any means complain of this. It is often the method of the inspired writers ; and in ten thousand cases, it is the most brief, convincing, and impressive manner of stating our opinions, and our arguments. Whatever of reasoning you have introduced into your note, and into the part of your sermon connected with it, is made doubly vivid and striking, by being exhibited in this form. The fact then that you do not in so many words affirm any thing, but merely make use of questions, is so far from implying that you do not wish to maintain the particular opinions which I have attributed to you, that it shows your determination to maintain them, and to inculcate them upon others, to the utmost of your power.

The two positions maintained.

In my remarks, then, I shall consider myself as warranted to proceed on the supposition, that you hold these two opinions, namely ; first ; *that sin is not the necessary means of the greatest good, and as such, so far as it exists, is not, on the whole, preferable to holiness in its stead* ;—second ; *that in a moral system, God could not have prevented all sin, nor the present degree of it.*—And if you should after all, say, that you do not mean either to defend or affirm these positions ; though I might be gratified to know this, I should still wish to subject the positions themselves to a careful examination. On this last supposition, (which I have made so as to be sure not to do you any injustice,) my object would be, not to charge these

opinions upon you, or upon others ; but to inquire, whether they are *true*. And then, though neither you nor your associates had ever embraced them, yet as some others may be exposed to them, the discussion may not be wholly lost.

But for the present you will permit me to canvass the two opinions referred to, as though it was your intention to maintain them by means of the summary arguments contained in the passages quoted from your pamphlet. And in prosecuting my undertaking, I shall labor to observe that excellent rule of the Rhetoricians, *so to express ourselves, that we not only may be understood, but cannot be misunderstood*. I shall at least hope not to cast any additional obscurities over a subject, which is in itself sufficiently obscure and difficult.

I shall begin with what I consider your second position. And as a proposition is generally true or false according as words or phrases are taken in one sense or another ; I shall remark on the different senses of the words which relate to *power*, or the *want* of it ; and shall then inquire in which of these senses the words appear to be used in your reasoning.

A distinction has commonly been made between the *literal* sense, and the *metaphorical* or *moral* sense of the words in question. This distinction is founded in the nature of things, and no man can deny it without involving himself in inconsistency. When I use the words in the *literal* or *proper* sense, and say, God has *power* to do a thing, or, he *can* do it ; I mean that he is *able* or *competent* to do it, *if he chooses* ; that there is in him no want of ability to prevent his doing it, if on the whole he prefers and wills to do it ; and I mean too, that if any thing whatever, which is the proper object of power, is not done, it is because God does not choose to do it, or sees it best not to do it,—and not because he is destitute of the requisite *power*.

Thus we say, God has *power* to raise the dead, and to do it now. The word *power* is here used in the *literal*, *proper* sense. Accordingly, if the dead are not raised, and are not raised *now*, it is not because God is *unable* to raise them, or is less able now, than he will be at the last day ; but solely because he does not see this to be best, and so does not choose it. If, when using words in the same literal sense, we should say, God *cannot* raise the dead ; our meaning would be, that if he should, on the whole, see it to be *best*,

and so should really *choose* and *will* to raise the dead ; it would still fail of being done, and would fail because he had not sufficient *power*. It would be implied, that if he only had *power* enough, the thing would be done. We do not commonly speak of God as wanting power in this sense, as we believe him to be omnipotent. But we speak familiarly of the want of this power in man. If in any case, he fails of accomplishing a particular thing which he really *chooses* and *wills* to accomplish ; we say, he is not *able*,—he has not sufficient *power*.

This I shall call the *first* sense of the words denoting the want of power. It is the *literal*, *proper* sense.

Let us now attend to the *metaphorical* or *moral* sense of the words denoting want of power. When in this sense we speak of intelligent beings as not being *able* to do a thing, we mean that their *judgment* or *inclination* prevents them from doing it ; that they have in their minds decisive reasons against doing it, or in favor of doing something else in its stead. Thus : God cannot lie ; he cannot do an act of injustice. Here, that which prevents God from doing the thing spoken of, is the perfection of his own nature,—his infinite wisdom and goodness, and not, properly speaking, the want of *power*. For an act of injustice may be done with as little *power*, as an act of justice. God had power, in the literal sense, to inflict evil upon Adam and Eve, and drive them out of Paradise, before they sinned, as really as after. What hindered him from doing it ? Infinite wisdom,—holiness,—justice. And when we say, he was *unable* to do this act, we can mean nothing more than that he was *totally disinclined*.

But the words which denote *inability*, or want of power, are sometimes used in a sense different from either of those above mentioned ; as when it is said, that God *cannot* do what is *self contradictory*, or *absurd*, or what is, from the very nature of the case, *impossible*. For example ; he cannot cause a thing to be and not to be, at the same time, and in the same respect. Or, he cannot cause a part of a thing to be greater than the whole of it. The thing is, in its own nature, utterly *inconsistent*. And so it is a case in which power, either literal or metaphorical, either natural or moral, has nothing to do. A being who has neither power nor goodness, is, so to speak, just as *able* to do the thing proposed, as God is. And God, though possessed of infinite power and goodness, is just as

unable to do it, as one wholly destitute of power and goodness. The fact is, such a thing has, properly speaking, no relation to power. It is not an object of power. And when we say, God *cannot* do it, we use the word *cannot* merely to signify, that it is utterly inconsistent and absurd to suppose such a thing.

I have thus endeavoured to define the three senses of the phrase in question, not assuming to be perfectly right in my views of so abstruse a subject, but holding myself ready to be corrected by you, or by others.

The position which is now to be examined, and which I have understood you to maintain, is this ; *that in a moral system God could not have prevented all sin, or the present degree of it.*

In what sense then do you speak of *the want of power* in God relative to this subject ? There are several circumstances which would seem to favor the idea that you speak of it in the *literal, proper* sense.

This might be naturally inferred from your question at your entrance on the subject. “Do you say then, God gave man a nature which he knew would lead him to sin ?—What if he did ? Do you know that God could have done better, better on the whole, or better, if he gave him existence at all, to the individual himself ? (See Appendix, 1.) The argument, in plain terms, appears to be this ; we have no reason to complain of God for doing as he has done, because he *could not* have done better, either on the whole, or for any individual.* Now had you meant to speak of an inability in the second, or *moral* sense, I should suppose the argument would have stood thus : *You cannot properly complain of the present system, because it is the one which God saw to be best, and which his infinite wisdom and goodness led him to adopt.* Or thus : *You cannot complain of God for not adopting another system, because he saw that no other system was on the whole better than this, and of course he could not consistently with his infinite wisdom and goodness prefer any other.* To represent the subject thus, would be perfectly honorable to the character of God. He has done what infinite wisdom

* I shall every where understand the discussion to relate to a moral system as actually existing, or to exist, or to different forms of a moral system ; and not to the question whether it would be better for God to create a moral system, or not to create,—a question scarcely worthy of a moment's consideration.

and benevolence dictated. He has not done differently, because infinite wisdom and benevolence did not permit, or did not lead to it. This is the common theory ;—the theory adopted by orthodox ministers and Christians generally. But the language you employ makes quite a different impression. To say we have no reason to complain of God for what he has done, *because he could not have done better*, either on the whole, or for any individual, sounds much like making an apology, and is very similar to what we often say in behalf of a weak, imperfect man, who is incompetent to the work he has undertaken, and, for want of power, fails of doing what he really wishes and endeavours to do. Any being surely ought to be excused, if he *means* right, and does all he *can*, though not all he would be glad to do. Now your language would seem to imply, that you intend to offer something like this as a justification of the conduct of God ; and of course it would seem to imply that the *inability* ascribed to God was meant to be understood in the first, or *literal* sense. If this was not your meaning, and if you intended to advance nothing different from the common theory ; then why should you deny the positions which exhibit that theory, and use language which would be likely to make an impression so different from your wishes. I hold, in common with others, that God would have forever excluded moral evil from the created universe, if he had seen that such a measure would on the whole be most conducive to the object of his benevolence. But it would be very strange, and contrary to all good usage, to express this by saying, God *could not* prevent his creatures from sinning ;—this is what he *wished*, but was *unable* to accomplish. No one uses phraseology like this, except to denote the want of power in the *literal* sense.

But that the meaning which I have supposed may be fairly considered as implied in your remarks, will, I think, become still more evident, as we proceed in the examination of the passages which I have quoted from your pamphlet.

If then, sin is *not* the necessary means of the greatest good, and is not on the whole for the best ; then it must follow that God does not *regard* it, or any degree of it, as on the whole for the best ; and, of course, that he does not *choose* that it should exist. On the contrary, it must be his desire and choice to prevent its existence, and to exclude it forever from every part of the universe. According to the supposition, he has the best possible reasons for such a choice,

and he could not be wise or good, if, all things considered, this were not his choice. Now any being, whether God or man, will accomplish what on the whole he chooses, if he is *able*. And if he is *unable*, it must be in the *literal, proper* sense. *Moral* inability is evidently precluded by the very statement of the case. For it is not the *wisdom* of God, nor his *benevolence*, nor his *will* or *choice*, which hinders him from shutting the door against sin, and producing universal holiness. According to the supposition, all his moral attributes must move him, with an infinite urgency, entirely to prevent the existence of sin. And when you say, he *could not* have prevented it, I should conclude your meaning must be, that he was *literally unable*; that he had such a want of power, as keeps an intelligent being from doing what he really, and on the whole, desires and chooses to do.

If you should say, you have expressly declared that you do not mean to speak of God's inability to prevent sin in the *literal, proper* sense, and that such a declaration of yours ought to be received as satisfactory; to this I could only reply,—that the general current of your writings leaves a different impression on my mind; and that, as I know of no rule, which should lead me to gather your opinion from a single affirmation, rather than from the general aspect of what you have written; I see no alternative, but either to admit that your language fails altogether of expressing your meaning, or to believe that you had one meaning in your mind at one time, and a different one at another;—a mental fluctuation certainly not impossible in uninspired men, and, where the nature of the subject is complex, not even improbable.

As to the third sense of inability above spoken of, a single remark will be sufficient here. If we say in this sense, that God *cannot* do a thing, it is the same as to say, the thing is, in its own nature *absurd* and *impossible*. Such a thing is in no way the *object* of power. This I have already stated. I now add, that it is not, and cannot be, the object of *desire* or *choice*. Who can suppose that such a being as God, or any intelligent being, desires or chooses any thing which he knows to be, in its very nature, inconsistent and impossible. And as several of your expressions clearly imply that you consider the exclusion of sin from the moral world as a thing which God on the whole *desired* and *preferred*, I see not how you can regard it as a thing wholly inconsistent and

preposterous. But if it is your opinion that God did *not* on the whole desire and prefer the utter exclusion of sin from the moral system, but permitted, or willed its introduction, as on the whole for the best ; then you agree with others ; and if, with *this* view, you should say, God *could not* prevent all sin, or the present degree of it ; you would use the word in the second, or *moral* sense, and the meaning would be, he could not do it consistently with his wisdom and goodness ; or, his wisdom and goodness prevented him from doing it ; or, which is the same thing, he did not see it to be best. And this is the common position.

LETTER III.

Does *the nature of things* make it impossible for God to prevent sin? Meaning of the phrase.

Nature of created beings. The case of the father and his sons. Analogy supposed does not exist. Does the nature of moral agency limit the power of God? Representation of the Reviewers. Opinions of the orthodox as to the existence of moral evil compared with Dr. Taylor's. His theory implies the independence of moral agents. Reasoning as to the nature of moral agency. Moral agency the same in all. Want of motives.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I now proceed to examine the more particular representations you make, on the subject introduced in the preceding letter. You inform your readers that the impossibility of God's preventing all sin, or the present degree of it, arises, in your view, from *the nature of things*.

Now by the nature of things I have been accustomed to understand either the nature of God, or the nature of created beings, or both. I am unable to think of any thing else which can be consistently intended by the phrase. I begin with the first of these.

The nature of God, taken in the moral sense, is the sum of his moral attributes. But some of your representations imply, that these attributes of God would lead him forever to prevent the existence of moral evil, if it were *possible* for him to do it. These attributes then, cannot be supposed to hinder him from preventing the existence of sin. If any thing in his nature hinders, it must, according to your scheme, be the want of *power*, in distinction from his moral perfections; and this I should think must be the same as the want of power in the *literal* sense.

I will next suppose, that by *the nature of things* you mean *the nature of created beings*.

Now all created beings are from God. He gave them their ex-

istence, their powers and faculties,—their *nature*. And it must be that he gave them such a nature as he chose to give. Here the question arises ;—would God give his creatures such a nature, as would make it impossible for him to prevent that, which he saw would *not* on the whole be for the best, and impossible to do what he saw would be for the best, and what he therefore chose to do ? Can we believe that, by giving created beings such a nature, God has voluntarily put a hindrance in the way of his adopting and executing a plan, which he really considers as, on the whole, preferable to the one which he has adopted ? If I do not mistake, you consider a moral system forever excluding sin, as the one which God on the whole decidedly preferred ; and the present system, not excluding sin, as the one which God felt himself under the necessity of adopting, if he adopted any,—and felt himself under this necessity, *because* the nature he was about to give his creatures would be such, as to render it *impossible* for him to accomplish the plan which he really preferred. Whether such a view as this can be admitted, will be a subject of farther consideration in another place.

Your reasoning from the case of the father and his sons, (See Appendix, 15) is, I think, altogether inconclusive. But it serves to explain more clearly the principles contained in your note. The analogy between God and a human father is indeed remarkably suited to illustrate and impress a variety of practical truths. But that it furnishes no foundation for an argument on the question at issue, is manifest from this important consideration, that the analogy is very imperfect, and must be subject to various limitations. It is as true in this case, as in any other, that *God's ways are not our ways*. Your reasoning would be conclusive, were not the relation between God and his creatures different from that between a father and his children. But it is different ; and different in regard to the very points on which a valid argument must be grounded. The *dependence* of creatures on God differs, both in its nature and degree, from the dependence of children on their father. The infinite God has a power over the circumstances, the conduct, and the character of all created beings as far above what any father has over the circumstances, conduct and character of his children, as the heavens are above the earth. Look now at the case you suppose. The father merely *knows* the propensities of his sons, the tendencies of their nature, and the circumstances of the condition designed for

them. He *knows* these, but has no effectual power to *alter* them. Whereas, if the Bible is true, that Being, “who doeth all things after the counsel of his own will,” can direct and control, just as he pleases, all the tendencies of our nature, all our propensities, and all the circumstances of our condition. The hearts of men are in his hand, and he turneth them whithersoever he will. “*He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy ;*” that is, he *converts* and *saves whom he will* ; and he would exert the same sanctifying influence upon others, if he saw it to be on the whole for the best. But the case of a father is very different. If he is affectionate and faithful, he does every thing he *can* to make his children virtuous and happy ; and if he does not make them so, it is merely for want of ability to do what he really wishes and endeavours to do ; that is, for want of power in the proper sense ; and his failure is always a source of heart-felt grief. Thus, in regard to those very points which are most essential in the reasoning, the analogy between the two cases fails, and of course the argument grounded upon it fails ;—fails as completely as the argument for universal salvation, which is grounded upon the same analogy.

We see also that in order to make this case answer your purpose, it must be implied that the inability which you attribute to God is an inability in the *literal, proper* sense. For if a father in such a case *could* alter the dispositions of his sons, or the state of the public Seminary to which he sends them,—if he had *power* to do this, he would do it. It is a grief to him that the propensities and circumstances of his beloved sons are not different ; he earnestly wishes them to be different ; but he cannot make them so. Now as your reasoning rests on the supposition, that there is, in this very respect, an analogy between the father here exhibited, and God, the Governour of the world ; it must be implied, that God labors under the same kind of inability, or want of power, with this father. As I understand your reasoning in this case, I cannot but consider it as in a high degree derogatory to the character of God.

But as you rely so much on the argument derived from the case of the father and his sons, and as the subject is so important ; I shall express my reflections upon it in another form, and even more particularly than might seem suitable in this place,—choosing rather to be chargeable with some repetition, as well as digression, than to omit any thing which might tend to illustrate the truth.

It was the opinion of the Pelagians, and it seems to be the opinion of some who hold the general principles of orthodoxy at the present day, that God has no influence over the human mind, except merely in the way of *moral suasion*. This is often called *moral influence*; by which I understand the influence of *rational considerations* presented to the mind. This opinion has been opposed by the ablest evangelical writers from the Reformation to the present age, and is, in my view, wide of the truth. So far as I can judge, the opinion has arisen from the supposition of an analogy which does not exist, between *human* power, and *divine* power;—between the influence of *man*, and the influence of *God*. This mistaken supposition may be accounted for in this way. It is a matter of experience, that *we* can have no influence over the minds of our fellow men, either in the way of convincing or persuading them, except by presenting considerations to their minds. From this some men have concluded, that it must be so with *God*. But in this conclusion, they have overlooked the most striking peculiarity of that influence which the Scriptures ascribe to the Supreme Being. I maintain, what I think may be proved from Scripture and from facts, that the analogy above supposed does not exist. Indeed the thing becomes obvious on a moment's reflection. God is the CREATOR of the mind. "He made us, and not we ourselves." And he has so constituted us, that we can have access to the minds of our fellow men in no other way, than by the use of words, and other sensible signs. But does it follow from this, that it must be so with the INFINITE God? As well might we say that, because we cannot create minds, therefore God cannot. He on whom the mind depends for its existence and all its faculties, must have access to it at all times, and, if he pleases, without any use of those means to which we are confined. In how many instances has God, without any instrumentality whatever, caused men to know at once, what they could never have learnt by natural means! The cases I refer to are indeed miraculous. But they are none the less adapted to prove, that *God can act directly on the mind*, and that his influence over its state is not subject to the limitations and imperfections, by which our influence is circumscribed. And as we see that even the most uncommon and miraculous operations of divine power in the human mind are consistent with its nature, and its relations to God; we surely cannot doubt that this is the case with that influ-

ence, which renews the heart, and without which no one can be saved.—All the power we possess over sinners, consists in the exhibition we make to them of divine truth. And both Scripture and experience teach, that we should always use this power in vain, were it not for a power distinct from ours, and altogether superior to it. When we have, in different ways, presented the truth to the minds of sinners for their consideration, we have done what is in our power; and if the thing stops there, they will continue to be dead in sin, and enemies to the truth. Now when God finds them in this very state, looking at the truth, but hating it; he can give them a heart to love it; and can do it instantly, all external circumstances remaining the same as before. So God promises *to take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh*. We cannot promise this. Or if we should be so presumptuous as to promise it, we could not perform it. Believers are born of God; not of man;—"not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man;"—"not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth." But God, "of his own will, begat us." As to the production of this spiritual change, man's power is excluded, and God's power is alone. When the Apostle says to some believers, "I have begotten you through the gospel;" he does indeed attribute to himself an agency in their conversion; but it must be understood as merely an *instrumental* agency, the success, and even the exercise of which depended wholly on God. The Apostle's agency was not like the agency of God. He takes special pains to point out the difference. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Had not God a power over the heart exceedingly different from what we possess, no sinner could ever be regenerated. *To renew the heart* is quite another thing, than presenting motives. Man can do this. But that is the work of omnipotence. The power which first created the soul, and that which now creates it, is the same, and is equally distant from man's power.

I have dwelt so long on this point, because I apprehend that those, who think the power of God over moral agents limited, ground their opinion on a supposed analogy, which does not exist, between the manner and extent of divine influence, and human influence. If the supposition of such an analogy is given up, as I am sure it must be; then the case of the father and his sons, stated in your note, fails of answering the purpose for which you produce it. That

your reasoning from the case may be valid, you must make it appear, that the power of God over the heart is of the same nature, and subject to the same limitations, with the power which a father has over the feelings and conduct of his sons, even while they are absent from him.

Leighton, who stands among the best of uninspired writers, has some passages in his Expository Lectures on the first Epistle of Peter, which are so appropriate to the present subject, that I shall take the liberty to quote them.

“To contest much, how in this regeneration, God works upon the will, and renews it, is to little purpose, provided this be granted, that *it is in his power to regenerate and renew a man at pleasure*. And how is it possible not to grant this, unless we will run into that error to think, that God hath made a creature too hard for himself to rule, or hath willingly exempted it? And shall the works of the Almighty, especially this work, wherein most of all he glories, fail in his hand? No: no sinner so dead, but there is virtue in his hand to revive him If his sovereign will be not a sufficient principle of this regeneration, why then says the Apostle James, *of his own will begat he us?*” Lect. on 1 Pet. 1: 23.

He says, the word is the means of effectual calling, “when the Spirit that speaks in the word, *works in the heart*, and *causes* it to hear and obey.”—“The word *calls*, but the spirit *draws*.”—“The strongest rhetoric, the most moving and persuasive way of discourse, is all too weak; the tongue of men and angels cannot prevail with the soul to free itself, and shake off all that detains it. Although it be convinced of the truth of those things which are represented to it; yet still it can and will hold out against it.”—“Only the Father of spirits hath absolute command of the souls of men, to work on them as he pleaseth, and where he will. This powerful, sanctifying spirit knows no resistance; works sweetly, yet strongly. It can come into the heart; whereas all other speakers are found to stand without. The still voice within persuades more than all the loud crying without.”—“There is a secret but very powerful virtue in a word, or look, or touch of this spirit upon the soul, by which it is forced, not with a harsh but a pleasing violence, and cannot choose but follow it.” 1 Pet. 1: 2.

I have thought it proper thus far to inquire whether *the nature*

of things can be supposed to *limit the power of God*, as you represent, so that he *could not* prevent all sin, or the present degree of it. But I have by no means intended to overlook the more specific view which you exhibit in regard to the subject before us. To this I shall now particularly attend.

Your position is, that the power of God is limited by *the nature of moral agency*; that *such is the nature of free agency that he could not wholly prevent its perversion*.

Of course you would not expect us to admit this without evidence. Many things have been asserted to be impossible; but it is always proper for us to inquire for the proof of what is asserted; especially in cases in which the salvation of souls is concerned. If either from the nature of moral agency, or a deficiency of power in God, the hearts of men are not perfectly in his hand, and he cannot make them what he would have them to be; then evidently they depend for salvation not upon *him*, but upon *themselves*:—a precarious dependence indeed!

In the Review of Taylor and Harvey in the *Christian Spectator* for 1829, p. 379, it is said; “So far is Dr Taylor from opening a new career of rash and fruitless speculation, that his object is to recall past speculations to greater truth and soberness.” Again, p. 384, the Reviewers, who seem every where to take pleasure in showing that they are united as parties and associates with you in this controversy, say; “we pretend not to assert, on this subject, what *was*, or was *not* possible with God. Our object has been to inquire whether men know as much respecting it, as some have assumed to know.” Now my impression has been widely different from this. It has seemed to me that on this subject, you and those agreeing with you, instead of being, as the Reviewers think, less presuming, less forward to *assert* and *decide*, than orthodox ministers and writers generally, have gone far beyond them. The orthodox generally regard the existence of sin under the divine government, as a profound mystery. They resolve it into the unsearchable wisdom of God; and pretend not to be able to obviate the difficulties which attend the subject, in any other way than by saying, that the incomprehensible God, for reasons which lie beyond human intelligence, taking a perfect view of his own attributes, and of the whole system of created beings, saw it to be best not to prevent the existence of moral evil; that in his inscrutable counsels he chose to ad-

mit it into the universe ; that in ways known only to himself and by a power which he only possesses, he will make it the means of glory to his name, and good to his kingdom ;—that when he converts some sinners and leaves others in impenitence, he acts according to his own *sovereign will*,—implying that the reasons for this conduct, which he has in his own mind, and which are perfectly satisfactory to his infinite wisdom, he has not made known to us, nor made us, in our present state, capable of discovering ;—so that we can only bow down in humble submission and adoration, and say, *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*. When we say, God saw the existence of moral evil to be on the whole for the best ; we say it, because we believe that all things depend ultimately on his will, and because we are confident, that the system which he has seen fit to adopt must be in the highest degree wise and benevolent. If we consider sin as the means of promoting the glory of God's character, and the good of his kingdom ; it is because we learn from his word and providence, that he uses it as such. Thus we resolve it all into the infinite perfection and the holy government of that Being, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things* ; and the positions we maintain result directly from our implicit confidence in his wisdom and goodness. We should naturally be inclined to think that God would prevent the existence of sin ; but he has not done it. Now we content ourselves with saying, he has not done it, because in his unsearchable wisdom he judged it best not to do it. This I consider to be the sober theory of the orthodox.—But you undertake to assign the *specific reason* why God has not prevented the existence of sin. You are not satisfied with saying, he did what he saw on the whole to be for the best—he did not exclude moral evil, because he judged it best not to exclude it—he chose and adopted the present system, which includes sin, because, all things considered, he regarded it as adapted in the highest degree to promote the the glory of his perfections and the sum of created happiness. You are not satisfied with this view. But you undertake to go to the bottom of the subject, and to show particularly, *why* God did not prevent the existence or the present degree of sin. You hold, that he did not do it, because he *could* not ; that if he created a system of moral beings at all, it must be a system in which moral evil should exist. You undertake to affirm, that there were *only two* things which a God of infinite wisdom and power *could* do ; that

there was no possibility of his taking any course, except one of these,—either not to create a moral system, or to create one which should include sin ; that he had no election between different systems, but only between this system, and no system. You hold that such is the nature of moral agency, that it was utterly impossible for God to prevent its perversion ; that if moral beings existed, it was unavoidable that some of them should sin ; and that omnipotence itself could not exert an influence upon them sufficient to prevent this. Let God create moral beings in any way he pleases ; let him place them in the most favorable circumstances, exert upon them the highest possible influence, and extend over them the most constant and most powerful protection ; let him watch them with his omniscient eye, and shield them with his omnipotent arm ; still, according to your theory, they will—at least some of them, fall into sin. You think there is, in moral agency itself, a power so resistless, that it is impossible for God himself, however strong may be his desire, to prevent the existence, or even the present degree of sin.

I have thus given a somewhat dilated view of what I understand to be your theory, in distinction from the common theory. And if I have understood you right, I think it must appear, that you have gone beyond the limits of sober judgment. You have undertaken to determine that God had no choice, and could have no choice, between different systems of different degrees of excellence, and that there was nothing for his wisdom to consider, but the single question, whether he should have a system including sin, or no system at all. Instead of leaving the reason why God chose the present system, as an inscrutable mystery ; you have boldly undertaken to remove at once all the difficulty and all the mystery attending the subject, and to assign the particular and only reason of the divine choice. So that, whatever may be the opinion of the Reviewers, it is evident that you do not hesitate at all “ to assert on this subject what *was* or was *not* possible with God.”

Your readers, I think, cannot avoid the impression that such as I have described is the ground you take. And the whole aspect of your note, the interest you manifest, your illustrations, your forcible and rhetorical interrogations,—all convey the idea, that the theory you exhibit is a favorite one with you, and that the views you express are the settled conviction of your own mind.

Respecting this particular theory, I have several things to offer.

I will just remark at the outset, that it seems to me, that you *have not supported it by any valid proof*, and that the reason you give why God has not prevented the existence of sin, is *no reason at all*. What there is in moral beings, which renders it impossible for God to preserve them in a state of holiness; or what there is in the very nature of moral agency which puts it out of the power of God to influence and control its operations, you have not shown. In a word, I see not that you have done more than to introduce an unsupported hypothesis. If you say, it is not your object to maintain this theory, but only to suggest that it *may* be true; then how shall we account for the decided tone with which you reject the common theory? And how shall we account for it, that you manifest such confidence in this theory, as one which relieves all your difficulties? Who was ever relieved of his difficulties on any subject, by means of a theory which he did not believe?

But before I enter on a particular examination of your reasoning, I shall suggest one thing more, namely; that the peculiar theory which I understand you to maintain, seems to imply that moral agents, as such,—that is, moral beings in the exercise of their moral agency, are *not dependent on God*. To say, that moral agents, as such, are *dependent* on God, is, according to the common understanding, the same as to say, that it depends on God's will, whether their moral agency shall be exercised in one way or another. It implies, that he has power over their moral faculties, and can excite or influence them to act right, if he chooses; that he can, if he pleases, make them holy, and keep them holy. On the other hand, to say, that moral agents as such are *not dependent on God*, is only saying, that it does not ultimately depend on God what their moral actions shall be; that they are not so under his control, that he can influence them, as moral agents, to feel and act right, when he pleases; and that it would be destructive of their moral agency, if he should thus influence them. Thus I apprehend that the *real independence of man in regard to his moral actions* will be found to be necessarily implied in your scheme of thought. I know not how far you may avow this sentiment. But I will take the liberty to say, that I could not adopt your language, or the theory which in my view it evidently implies, without denying what the Bible every where teaches, what all Christians practically believe, and what enlightened philosophy has always admitted,—the doctrine that man

is entirely dependent on God,—dependent particularly as to his moral character and actions.

I now proceed more particularly to inquire into the truth of your position, that *the nature of moral agency limits the power of God, and renders it impossible for him to prevent the existence or the present degree of sin.*

To assert that a thing is impossible is quite different from proving it to be so. Many have asserted that it is impossible for God to *create*; but they have not proved it. We believe the opposite; and for the support of our belief, we refer to the fact, that God has created. As to the position, that the nature of moral agency renders it impossible for God to prevent all sin or the present degree of it; I maintain that the nature of moral agency occasions no such impossibility; that moral agents are in a state of perfect dependence on God; that he has power to make them holy, and to preserve them holy, just as far as he chooses; and that, when he does not make or preserve them holy, he is not hindered by want of power; that he is not prevented by any uncontrollable necessity, nor by any thing too hard for him in the nature of moral agency; but that, while he acts with a power to which nothing can present an obstacle, he has suffered his creatures to fall into sin, and suffers many of them to continue in sin, for reasons which exist in his own infinite mind, beyond the reach of human intelligence.

Now what is meant by the phrase, a thing is impossible *in its own nature*, or *its nature is such* as to make it an impossibility? By this I understand what was pointed out as the third sense of the words *inability, cannot*, etc. It is a case where to suppose the thing done is a contradiction, or an absurdity. Thus, that a part of a thing should be greater than the whole, or the whole smaller than a part; or that a thing should be and not be at the same time; or that an effect should be produced without a cause; or that sin should be holiness, or holiness sin; or that there should be bounds to what is strictly infinite,—is *in itself* an *impossibility*. To suppose such a thing would be preposterous. In regard to every case of this sort, the impossibility or absurdity is perfectly manifest to all who understand the terms employed. No proof is wanted; because nothing can be more certain. It is true also, in regard to things of this kind, that the impossibility exists *universally*. It is not the fact, that while the thing is impossible in some instances, it is not in oth-

ers. It is equally impossible in all instances. In all cases, to suppose the thing is self-contradictory and absurd.

Now if you affirm that *the very nature of moral agency* renders it impossible for God to influence moral agents in such a manner as to preserve them from sin ; you must, I should think, affirm it to be so universally, and in every instance. If, as you hold, the *very nature of moral agency* is such that God cannot prevent its perversion, that is, cannot prevent the commission of sin ; then this must be the case in every instance in which moral agency exists. So that we must say in regard to this and that individual, and to every individual among moral beings, it is impossible for God to preserve *him* from sin. If, as you think, this impossibility arises from the *very nature of moral agency* ; then, if any individual being *has* moral agency, the impossibility of course relates to him. If you had supposed that this impossibility arises from any particular circumstances ; then you might consistently say that, as these circumstances vary in regard to different individuals, it may be possible for God to prevent sin in some instances, though not in others. But as you seem to make the impossibility to consist entirely in the *nature of moral agency*, the impossibility must be the same wherever moral agency exists. But according to the Reviewers before mentioned, your scheme of doctrine, as well as the common one, implies, that in a moral system God could have prevented each sin, individually considered. Now all the sins in the universe are *individual sins*. There is no such thing as *general* sin, except what is made up of particular, individual sins. If then, as your system is said by the Reviewers to imply, God could have prevented each individual sin, or “each sin individually considered ;” then I should suppose he could have prevented all sins. For if *each* sin was prevented, what sin could there be which was not prevented ? But to prevent each individual sin, is the same as to prevent each individual agent from sinning. As therefore, according to what your system supposes in the judgment of the Reviewers, God could have prevented each sin, individually considered, he could have prevented each moral agent, individually considered, from sinning,—these being one and the same thing. Thus the same Reviewers allow that “God might doubtless have prevented the access of the tempter to our first parents, or have unveiled his true character, or by a divine influence have prevented

their yielding to his insinuations," p. 381. And yet, what must appear not a little strange, you seem to think there is that in each individual moral agent, which renders it impossible for God to prevent his sinning; and this ground of impossibility you have said, is *the very nature of moral agency*; which of course belongs to every moral agent. And I would have it remembered, that this ground of impossibility belongs *equally* to all moral agents;—belongs to one as much as to another; and to each moral agent as much as to a moral world. It exists as *perfectly* in each, individually considered, as in all collectively considered; and relates as much to "each sin individually considered," as to all sins considered collectively. So that I see not how to avoid the conclusion, that if, from the very nature of moral agency, it was impossible for God to prevent sin in the moral world, it was impossible for him to prevent it in any instance whatever; and to speak of God as actually preventing sin, would be inconsistent. The same as to the conversion and salvation of sinners. You hold that the nature of moral agency makes it impossible for God to convert all sinners. The nature of moral agency you consider to be the only obstacle in the way. Be it so. This insurmountable obstacle exists in relation to each and all alike. So that if there is reason to assert in regard to any sinners, (say those who will continue impenitent,) that God cannot convert them; there is the same reason to assert it in regard to all others. The impossibility relates to every sinner on earth. And to speak of God's actually converting *any*, would be to speak of that which, in the nature of things, is impossible.

But perhaps, after all, you will not adhere to the idea, that the nature of moral agency is the *sole* ground of the impossibility which you affirm. You may suppose, as your reasoning in some places seems to imply, that in order to prevent sin, or to convert sinners, in particular cases, God must have the advantage of motives possessing a certain degree of power; and that, in some circumstances, God must have motives of greater power, than in others. You often refer to a particular kind of motives as having an influence, without which God could not preserve moral agents holy. And probably you will maintain the opinion, which I shall bring particularly under examination by and by,—that God may preserve moral beings in a state of holiness for a time, by means of less powerful motives, than he will find necessary in order to preserve them afterwards.

According to this view of the subject, the nature of moral agency is not the only thing, which operates to render it impossible for God to prevent moral beings from sinning ; but besides this, there is the hindrance which arises from the want of sufficient motives, or from the occurrence of temptations. And so, if this be indeed your belief, the whole of your system on this point would, I apprehend, require to be stated thus. ‘ Such is the nature of moral agency, and such are the circumstances of *some* moral agents, that God cannot prevent their sinning. But, though the nature of moral agency remains the same ; the circumstances of *other* moral agents are such, —in other words, such are the means which God has to influence them, that he is able to preserve them from sin ;—as he preserved the angels who kept their first estate.’ According to this, the difference of God’s influence over some moral agents from what it is over others, is really owing to the *difference of circumstances*. But then, to what is this *difference of circumstances* owing ? Could God have ordered circumstances in another manner ? Could he have placed those who sinned in such circumstances, as would have made it possible for him to prevent them from sinning ? If he could ; then, after all, it was in his *power* to prevent. If he could not ; then his power is limited in this respect, as well as the other ; so that he is not almighty in his providence ; and when we say, that God has a perfect control over all the circumstances of his creatures, we say more than the truth.*

I maintain that in all the circumstances in which moral agents exist, God has power to make and preserve them holy ; that if the motives to holiness which are set before them are sufficient to put them under obligations to be holy ; God is able, by those motives,

* The following passage from Fenelon happily expresses the general views of evangelical Christians upon this subject.

“ We should be so far from dishonorably seeking for the cause of the volitions of God, in his foreknowledge of future conditional events, on the different plans which he had sketched for his work ; that, on the contrary, we should look for the cause of these events, and of the very foreknowledge which he has of them, *in his will alone*, which is the sole reason of every thing.—No, my God, thou hast not consulted many plans, to which thou wast constrained to subject thyself. For what could constrain thee ? Thou dost not prefer one thing to another, because thou foreseest that it *must be* ; on the contrary, it cannot be, unless thou willest it so to be. Thy choice does not servilely follow on, after that which must happen ; but it is thy sovereign, almighty, productive choice, which makes every thing to be what thou ordainest.” Vol. II. p. 251.

to influence them to holiness. The power of God to make men holy does not, in my view, necessarily depend on the external circumstances in which they are placed, or on the variety or comparative strength of the external motives presented before their minds. And to prove this, I refer to what God has actually done. Under the former dispensation, the circumstances of men were comparatively unfavorable ; and the external motives which urged them to holiness, much less various and powerful, than under the gospel dispensation. Fewer truths were revealed, and those which were revealed, were revealed less clearly, and understood less perfectly. And yet in those unfavorable circumstances, God converted many sinners. He made men holy in some instances, where their outward condition seemed to cut off all prospect of their salvation. It is a thought which I love to cherish, that when men are left destitute of the advantages of the word of God, and when only those few truths, which are obscurely made known by the light of nature, or by a traditional revelation, are within their reach ; still God can save them, and, in some instances, actually does save them, by means of those few truths, no less than by means of those higher truths contained in the Christian Scriptures. Several passages in the Bible evidently imply this. Now if God does in fact convert sinners in those less favorable circumstances ; he certainly *can* do it. And if he *can* do it ; then neither the nature of moral agency, nor the want of more powerful motives, nor both united, constitute any such impossibility as you speak of. And if they constitute no impossibility in these cases, they cannot be supposed to do it in other similar cases. And so, after all, notwithstanding the moral agency of sinners, and notwithstanding any unfavorable circumstances which may attend them, God has power to convert as many of them as he pleases. Even in a state where but little light shines, and but few truths are understood, *God can have mercy on whom he will have mercy*, just as he can under the clear light of the gospel.

Perhaps it may be thought that certain representations in the Bible are at variance with these views. Christ said, if the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had enjoyed the advantages which the inhabitants of Judea enjoyed, they would have repented ; implying that better means,—that more powerful exhibitions of truth were necessary, and would have been effectual, where inferior means failed. I allow that Christ said what implied this ; and that the *common*

method of God's gracious administration confirms the same view. And so our conclusion must be, that God has determined to convert sinners *most frequently* where the best means are enjoyed. But can we infer from this, that God was not *able* to proceed in a different way, and to convert as many sinners where there were but few advantages, as where there were many? Not at all. Christ does not say, that God had not *power* to convert sinners in Tyre and Sidon without those better means of which he spake; but only that if they had enjoyed those better means, they would have repented. Now we must conclude, that the method which God in the exercise of his mercy *generally* pursues, is the one which he sees to be wisest and best;—but not that he was *unable* to pursue a different method.

But let us see how it is now under the gospel dispensation, and in a Christian land. Here there are means and motives in abundance. So far as the influence of means and motives is necessary to the success of what God undertakes, there is surely no deficiency here. In these circumstances, there can be no want of what some call "*moral power*" in God. How much soever his "*moral power*" may fall short in other circumstances; here certainly he has sufficient. And so it must be true, that, in these circumstances, and armed with this high "*moral power*," he *can* convert sinners. He certainly does convert some. This proves that he *can* convert some, and that *the nature of their moral agency* does not make it impossible. Now why has not God the same power to convert others? Their moral agency is the same thing; their circumstances are substantially the same; God's power is the same; even his "*moral power*" is the same. Now if you say that, although God *can* convert some, (namely, those that he does convert,) he *cannot* convert others; I ask, what hinders? What renders it impossible? Is it the nature of moral agency? But that is the same in all. Is it the want of means and motives? There is no such want here. Is it the want of "*moral power*?" We have seen that in such circumstances, this cannot be. What then is the hindrance?—If you allow that God has power to convert other sinners, as well as those whom he does convert, and that his not doing it is, as the Bible represents, owing to his sovereign *will*, and not to any supposed impossibility in the nature of things; then we have no more controversy on this point.

Let me say here, what has already been intimated, that many

facts mentioned in Scripture, such as the conversion of Abraham, and the piety of a great multitude of his posterity, and some of them in times of gross darkness, and the piety too of a considerable number among the gentile nations, where the light of truth shone very dimly, and a series of similar facts in modern times, clearly show, that the renewal of the hearts of men has no necessary dependence on the degree of light which they enjoy, or on the number or strength of the external motives presented to their minds ; but that it depends ultimately on the *will of God*.

I pray you, Brother, to inquire, whether your scheme of thought does not tend towards a denial of all divine power and divine influence in the conversion of sinners, except merely such a kind of power and influence as we have over the minds of our fellow men. And it ought to be a subject of serious consideration, whether such a denial would not stand in direct opposition to the declarations of Scripture. If I do not entirely misunderstand the word of God, he claims a power which is, in its nature, peculiar to himself;—which entirely distinguishes the Creator from his creatures,—a power which is infinite, and which extends to all the faculties and acts of the human mind and heart, as well as to outward circumstances ; and this power of God over the intellectual, and especially over the moral acts of men, and over every thing which goes to constitute their character, is, in its operations, subject to no restrictions, except from the dictates of his holy will ; and it is directed and regulated wholly and exclusively by his unerring wisdom. The opinion, by whomsoever advanced, that because *we* can have no direct access to the hearts of our fellow-men, and no influence over them except merely by presenting motives to their view, therefore *God* cannot, I consider to be an error of the most dangerous tendency. And although that peculiar, efficacious power, which God claims and exercises directly over the inmost soul of every one whom he converts, creating the heart anew, and influencing every thought and affection as his infinite wisdom dictates,—although this direct and perfect power over the heart, which God claims as one of his prerogatives, is at the present day often, but very erroneously, called *physical* power ; still it is none the less a reality for being *misnamed*, and none the less important to the glory of God and the salvation of men.

I add one thought more. If God is unable to direct and con-

trol moral agency, as he pleases ; it plainly follows that he is unable to direct and control those events which depend upon it, or are involved in it. Now nothing is more evident, than that the general course of events in the moral and civil world are inseparably connected with the dispositions and characters of men, and result from them. To assert, then, that God cannot govern the dispositions, and form the characters of men according to his will, is to assert, that he cannot order *events* according to his will. And it will be easy for any one to perceive, that to assert this, is to set aside the truth of the Bible.

LETTER IV.

Dr Taylor's reasoning on the supposed impossibility arising from moral agency.—Nature of the subject. Can it be proved that a being who *can* sin, will *not* sin? The actual occurrence of any thing depends on appropriate causes. God has a perfect control over human beings. Argument from *facts* as to God's being able to prevent sin. Influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin not absolutely necessary. God's not preventing sin resolved into his unsearchable wisdom. Common theory does not limit the goodness of God. Whether God's creatures have a power which he has not.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

It is due to you, that I should attend more particularly to the reasoning you have introduced on the subject under consideration.

The question before us is, whether the entire prevention of sin in moral beings, or the prevention of the present degree of it, is possible to God in *the nature of things*; or, whether God was able to prevent the existence of sin, or the present degree of it, *without destroying man's moral agency*.

In your reasoning on the subject, you refer to two sources of evidence; the *nature of the subject*, and *facts*.

The nature of the subject.

You say, "the prevention of sin by any influence which destroys the *power* to sin, destroys moral agency. Moral agents must therefore possess the *power* to sin." And then you ask; "who can prove a priori, or from the nature of the subject, that a being who *can* sin, will not sin?" And I ask, who can prove that such a being *will* sin? You ask; "How can it be proved a priori, or from the nature of the subject, that a thing will *not* be, when for aught that appears, it *may* be?" And I ask as to the same thing,—how it can

be proved that it *will* be, when for aught that appears it may *not* be? The bare possibility of a thing is no proof at all, either that it *will* be, or will *not* be.

But the question seems to be a favorite one with you; and perhaps this reply does not exactly meet the design of it. I will therefore consider it farther. You ask with emphasis; “who can prove a priori, or from the nature of the subject, that a being who *can* sin, will *not* sin?”—Now, according to your manner of using words, I suppose you would say of the supreme Being, that he *can* sin. You certainly consider him to be a moral agent; and you consider the power to sin as necessarily belonging to moral agency, so that there can be no moral agent without it. According to the principles then which you adopt, here is an instance in which it can be proved with perfect clearness, that a being who *can* sin, will *not* sin,—and proved too from the nature of the subject, that is, from the nature of the being referred to. It results with absolute certainty from the nature of God, that he will *not* sin; though in your sense of the word, he has *power* to sin.

But perhaps you would confine your remarks on this point to *created* moral agents. Be it so. You doubtless hold that *Satan* is a moral agent, and of course that he has *power* to love God. But may it not be certainly proved, from his very nature, I mean his *moral* nature as it now is, that he will *not* love God?

Whether a thing which is *possible*, will actually take place or not, depends, I have said, not on the mere *possibility* of it, but on other considerations. There are appropriate causes of action. In other words, there are things within and without a moral agent, which prove excitements to action, and to action of a particular kind. These causes, or excitements are in some cases such, that the moral agent will do *right*; and in other cases such, that he will do *wrong*. The causes which act in or upon a holy angel are such, that he certainly will act in a holy manner. The causes, or influences, human and divine, under which a regenerate man acts, are such, that, as you and I believe, he certainly will persevere in holiness. The causes or influences, under which an unregenerate man acts, are such, that, so long as he continues in a state of unregeneracy, he certainly will sin. A moral agent’s acting right or wrong, is an effect, depending, not on the bare possession of *power*, (which can never account for his acting in one way rather than

another,) but on those peculiar causes, whether external or internal, which are adapted to influence him to act in this or that particular manner. And it is very obvious in itself, and a matter of common experience, that just so far as we have power over the causes under which a moral being acts, we can influence him to act right or wrong, as we please. The only thing which limits our influence in this respect is, that we have only a limited or partial power over the causes of action.

Here we find one of the great points of difference between God and man. We are taught both by reason and Scripture, that God has a perfect, unlimited power over all the springs and occasions of action in human beings,—over every thing which has the nature of a motive or excitement to action ; and especially over the disposition of the heart. This appears to me so clear and certain, that I should no more expect that any man would deny it, than that he would deny the principle of gravitation, or even the divine existence. Now as God has such power over the dispositions, hearts, and circumstances of men,—over all that moves to action ; he can influence them as he will, and can determine in every instance, what their moral affections and actions shall be. If in any instance he cannot influence them to act as he pleases, it must be because there are some causes or occasions of action over which he has not a perfect power. You will understand of course that I refer not to causes of a physical nature, which indeed have no relation to the subject, except as they come into contact with moral causes, and through them, excite moral affections, and lead to moral actions.

If then it is, as I have endeavoured to show, that God is the cause of all causes ; if he has a perfect power over every thing within and without the mind, which can prove an excitement to moral action, and consequently over moral action itself ; there would seem to be no great difficulty in answering the following question of yours (Appendix, 13); “Had God prevented the sins of one human being to the present time, or had he brought to repentance one sinner more than he has ; who can prove that the requisite interposition for the purpose would not result in a vast increase of sin in the system, including even the apostacy and the augmented guilt of that individual ?” I answer : The apostacy of the sinless man, or of the penitent, here supposed, could be very easily prevented, if God pleased, by his continuing so to direct the causes of action, that holy conduct should

be the result. As he can make a moral agent holy at one time as well as at another,—to-morrow as well as to-day ; so doubtless he can ensure his holiness for a longer, as well as for a shorter time,—forever, as well as for a single moment. While he continues to be God, he can accomplish whatever he pleases. Instead then of requiring proof, that apostacy and increased guilt would not result from God's interposition in converting moral agents, or in preserving them holy, and that his own work would not thus fail in his hands ; would it not rather be incumbent on you to show reasons for a suspicion so derogatory to his infinite perfections ?

Argument from Facts.

You say, (Appendix, 13,) “ Facts, so far as they are known to us, furnish no support to the assumption that God could in a moral system prevent sin, or the present degree of it. For we know of no creature of God, whose holiness is secured without that influence which results, either directly or indirectly, from the existence of sin and its punishment. How then can it be shown from facts, that God could secure any of his moral creatures in holiness without this influence ; or to what purpose is it to allege instances of the prevention of sin under this influence, to prove that God could prevent it without this influence ? ”

On this subject, I appeal to *fact*, as well as you. The important fact I refer to, is the case of moral agents before the first apostacy in heaven. They then existed in a state, in which there was *no* sin, and no punishment of sin, and in which, of course, they could be brought under no influence arising from such punishment. They were moral agents then, as much as afterwards ; and their being so implied that they acted under the influence of motives. The motive arising from the existence and punishment of sin, was wanting. But, without this, there were effectual motives to holiness. It is not fear of punishment, that can be supposed to prompt new-created seraphs to love that Being, from whose infinite goodness they have just proceeded. In their own holy hearts, and in the holy character of their God, they find all the inducements they need to gratitude, love, and praise. Neither “ directly nor indirectly ” can the existence and punishment of sin be necessary to inspire their purest devotions. And surely he who gave them their holy nature, and placed them in those favorable circumstances, could so influence that nature, and so control those circumstances, that they

should continue to love and obey him for the same reasons, as at first. It is a fact, that he did, for a time, preserve them from sin, without any influence derived from the existence and punishment of sin. He preserved them by giving efficacy to the existing motives to holiness, and by rendering any temptations to sin abortive and powerless,—that is, he so influenced *their minds*, that they complied with the one, and rejected the other:—for, in my view, the divine influence, in every such case, acts upon the *mind itself*; in other words, upon *man considered as an intelligent, moral being*; and not upon any object distinct from the mind, and presented before it as an inducement to action. Such is my deliberate view of the subject, though I wish not here to make it a matter of discussion.

But I propose a farther examination of your argument from *fact*. The argument, as we have seen, is substantially this: As God has not, so far as we know, actually secured the holiness of any moral agent, without the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin; we have no reason to suppose that he *could* have done it.

But do you adopt it as a general principle, that God *could not* have done that which he has not done? or, that his not having done a thing, is a proof that he was not *able* to do it? For example; is the fact, that God did not make the planet which we inhabit as large as Jupiter, or that he did not give to men as high a degree of intelligence, as he gave to angels, a proof that he *could not*? God's not having done a thing does indeed prove, that he judged it *best* not to do it, or that he had *good reasons* for not doing it. Does it prove an thing more?

But I return to your question again. If God *could* prevent all sin,—why has he not done it? * And may I not put the following questions, as equally proper?—If God *could* send the gospel to all nations, why has he not done it? If he *could* have sent legions of angels to protect Jesus from the malice of his ene-

* The manner in which you put the question here seems to make a kind of solecism, not very unlike what you charge upon some imaginary opponents, (Concio, p. 7.)—"If God could prevent all sin without this influence," (i. e. the influence of sin actually existing,) "why has he not done it?" Do you mean to imply, that he could prevent *all sin with* this influence? But how could he prevent *all sin by means* of sin; when the very existence of the means would imply that *all sin* was not prevented? I suppose your meaning is, that God could not prevent the existence of sin in any part of the creation, without the influence of its existence and punishment in some other part.

mies ; why did he not send them ?—To all such questions, Jesus has taught us to reply : “ *Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.* ”—This I deem a sufficient reply to your question. God did not prevent all sin nor the present degree of it, *because it seemed good in his sight not to prevent it.* This answer is all that is necessary, and all that the case admits. In ten thousand instances, the reasons of God’s conduct are unsearchable to us ; but they are none the less weighty and none the less satisfactory for that. God is infinitely wise and good ; and whatever he does is right. What if the reasons for it are unknown to us ? Who are we, that we should expect to find out the Almighty to perfection ? Implicit confidence in the Supreme Being, when the reasons of his conduct are unknown, is an exercise of faith which is altogether suitable for us, who are of yesterday, and know nothing. It is in the exercise of such faith, that the mind of man finds its sweetest repose.

You seem to think it quite honorable to God to say, he *would* have prevented sin, but *could* not. And you ask, whether “ he who is startled at your supposition,” as though it limited the *power* of God, “ does not limit the *goodness* of God ? ” But how does it limit the goodness of God, to say, he governs his conduct by the highest reasons, and refrains from doing what he sees to be on the whole best not to do ?

You make a suggestion, which I shall notice more particularly in a subsequent Letter : namely ; that God’s *creatures* had power to prevent sin, but that *he* had not. (See Appendix 13.) “ Had his creatures done what *they* could, then indeed there had been more holiness, and less sin.” To *creatures*, then, you attribute a power, which you deny to the Creator. But from whom did they derive this power ? Was it not from *God* ? And in what does this power consist, but in the exercise of the nature which he has given them ? Now is it true, that God has endued his creatures with a power, which he does not possess ? Is it true, that his great work as Governour of the world, is, to follow on after the movements of this independent power in his creatures, and to remedy, as far as in him lies, an evil which he could not prevent ? Is it true, that he has created a sovereignty in his universe, over which he has no control, and which may therefore prostrate his benevolent designs ? And is it true, that the Psalmist was so much mistaken, when he said, “ Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth ? ”

LETTER V.

The reasoning from moral agency farther examined. The supposition, that God could not wholly prevent its perversion without destroying it. Dr. Dwight's views. The more specific position, that God could not do better for any individual sinner. It has no proof either from facts, or from the nature of the subject. Groundless apprehension of what would result from the interposition requisite for the conversion of more sinners.—Direct proof that God is able to convert more sinners. 1. From his omnipotence. 2. From what he has done. 3. From the requisition of prayer. 4. From the representation of Scripture, that God converts men according to his *will* or *pleasure*.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

In the preceding Letter I began an examination of the arguments which you urge in favor of your theory, from the nature of the subject, and from facts. You have perceived that on this whole subject our views are radically different; and that, in my judgment, you have failed in both the arguments, by which you attempt to establish your hypothesis. I consider it an obvious mistake in you to suppose, that there is any thing either in the nature of the subject, or in facts, which furnishes the least evidence against the common orthodox theory. But as the subject before us is remote from common apprehension, and requires, above most others, a patient and thorough examination; I would not pass over it in haste. I rather prefer to recur to the same topics again and again, and to subject myself to the charge of repetition, than to leave any form or aspect of your reasoning unnoticed, or any of the heights or depths of your theory unexplored. And I would hope that, in consequence of a free and candid examination, whatever is true and important in your peculiar views may be discovered and embraced, and that whatever is erroneous and delusive may be exposed and rejected.

The argument, on which you mainly rely, is the one you derive from the *nature of moral agency*. With this argument your theory must stand or fall.

You evidently think it reasonable and proper "to suppose, that such is the nature of *free agency* that God *could not* wholly prevent its perversion;" (see Appendix, 10;) which I understand to be the same as to suppose, that God could not prevent all sin, without destroying moral agency. But the divine influence, even the most *efficacious* divine influence upon our moral nature, is the very last thing in the universe, which I should suppose could destroy or injure it. From the moment in which God created a moral world, he has been exerting his influence upon it in every conceivable manner, and in the highest degree. He preserved angels in holiness, when their fellows apostatized. He has renewed sinners, who have been at the greatest remove from goodness; has given purity of heart to the most polluted, and subdued the most obstinate and rebellious; and has preserved his people from apostacy, when it could be done only by the exertion of great *power*, as well as love. But in any of these innumerable cases, in which the power of God has been effectually exerted among angels or men, has it in the least infringed upon their moral agency? Was an angel, or a redeemed sinner ever conscious that the divine power exerted upon him prevented moral action? Do we hear any complaints from holy beings of that benign and sanctifying influence which made them what they are? Do they regard the spirit of God as an object of fear and terror, calculated, by his almighty operations, to reduce them from the rank of free moral beings? Do they not rather look for it with strong desire, and seek it with fervent prayer?—The reason, if I mistake not, why you suppose that God could not prevent all sin without destroying moral agency, is, that you suppose he could not prevent all sin, without destroying the *power* to sin? (see Appendix, 12.) But does the whole history of moral agents furnish a single instance, in which the divine influence has been felt to abridge or destroy their proper power? On the contrary, the consciousness of every one who has been renewed by the spirit of God may be cited as evidence, that the highest exertions of the divine Spirit are consistent with our moral nature, and harmonize entirely with our voluntary powers. The energy of God in the soul of man does not compel and degrade, but heals and elevates. When he moves the mind

most powerfully and effectually, he still does it, not with an unwellcome force or violence, but with a kind, gentle, attractive influence, “congruous to the essential nature of the soul,” and coalescing perfectly with our intellectual and moral faculties. In short, the power which God exerts in the prevention of sin, so far from destroying our proper agency, only directs and secures it; and the power which he exerts in recovering from sin, so far from infringing our moral faculties, only restores them to health and vigor. Charnock says, “God, who knows how to make a will with a principle of freedom, knows how to work upon the will without intrenching upon or altering the essential privilege he bestowed upon it.” “At what time God doth savingly work upon the will, to draw the soul from sin—it doth with the greatest willingness,—follow after God. *Draw me, we will run after thee.* Drawing signifies the efficacious power of grace; running signifies the delightful motion of grace: the will is drawn, as if it would not come; it comes, as if it were not drawn. His grace is so sweet and so strong, that he neither wrongs the liberty of his nature, nor doth prejudice his absolute power.—The Spirit glides into the heart by sweet illapses of grace, and victoriously allures the soul,—not by crossing, but changing the inclination, by the all-conquering—charms of love.—The power of the Spirit is sweet and irresistible.—An inexpressible sweetness allures the soul, and an unconquerable power draws the soul.”

Your theory, my dear Brother, supposes, that there is something in moral agency, which renders it impossible for divine power to control it. But what this something is, you have nowhere told us. I beg you now to look at the subject again; and then tell us, what is that *something*,—that *mysterious attribute* of moral agency, which thus frees it from its dependence on God? Who created moral agents? Who sustains them? Who governs the world, and directs all events, even those which flow directly from the character and actions of intelligent, moral beings? From some of your remarks, moral agency would seem to be a thing so extremely *delicate* and *frail*, as to be in danger of being spoiled by the most gentle, skilful touch of the divine hand; while, from other remarks, it would seem to be so extremely *obstinate* and *unmanageable*, that the power which created worlds, cannot move it.

In regard to the point here at issue, I have the satisfaction of referring you to the views of that excellent man, your “revered in-

structor in theology," whose name you so highly respect, and with whom you claim the honor of agreeing in *every article of doctrinal belief*.* He says, one of the methods of accounting for the introduction of sin, is, *that God could not prevent his creatures from sinning, without destroying their free agency*. But he states it as an unanswerable objection to this, "that God has actually preserved some of the angels from falling, and that he has promised to preserve, and will therefore certainly preserve the spirits of just men made perfect, and that this has been, and will be done *without infringing at all on their moral agency*. Of course he could just as easily have preserved Adam from falling without infringing on *his* moral agency."*

In the previous discussion I have meant to attend chiefly to that prominent point in your system, namely, *that God could not prevent all sin*. But I have considered you as also maintaining the more specific position, that *God could not prevent the present degree of sin, and that he could not have done better than he has done for any individual*. By this last, you doubtless mean, that he could neither have prevented any individual sinner from sinning, nor have caused him to sin less than he has sinned. For had God done either of these for any individual, he surely would "have done better for him."

It will, I think, conduce to the object of this discussion, and help us to test one of the great principles involved in your theory, if we now turn our attention for a while to this more specific position. I have indeed occasionally remarked upon it in connexion with the more general position, that God could not prevent *all* sin. But I wish to examine it now more thoroughly, and to express my views of it more fully.

But I am reminded here, that you not unfrequently deny the positions, which your readers understand you to hold; and that you may perhaps in the present case affirm, that you neither maintain nor admit the doctrine, just stated as yours. Should you do this, your brethren might be happily relieved of a part of their difficulties. But even then, as your language is obviously liable to the construction I have given it, and thus may lead to views which I apprehend to be erroneous on a very important point; I could not regard the

* See Preface to *Concio ad clerum*.

† Dwight's *Theology*, Sermon 27.

present discussion as needless ; but should consider myself as required to exhibit at length, according to the proposed plan of remarking, the objections which I feel to the above mentioned position,—whether you hold it or not.

In general, I do not admit *that God could not have prevented any individual sinner from sinning, or caused him to sin less*, because such a position has no proof.

First ; I say of this more specific position, as I did of the general one, it has no proof from *fact*. God's not having converted particular sinners, or caused them to sin less, is no proof that he had not *power* to do it ; considering that, in a thousand cases, God may have, and actually has reasons for not doing what he *could* do if he would.

Secondly ; there is no proof of the position which we are now considering, from the *nature* or *circumstances of sinners*. One who is not converted, has the same nature, the same laws of mind, the same principles of moral agency, and the same corrupt dispositions, with those who are converted. As to his depravity ; can it be supposed to exceed the depravity of all who are converted ? Are the laws of mind, or the principles of moral agency more difficult to be managed in *him*, than in *them* ? And as to *free will* too ;—is it any more corrupt, any more obstinately biassed against holiness, any more hard to be subdued, in *him*, than in *them* ? And if not ; why should *his* conversion be thought impossible to God, while *theirs* is allowed to be possible ?

In agreement with the best divines in New England, and in the Reformed churches generally, I hold that God, being infinitely powerful and good, would convert more sinners than he does, yea, all sinners, if he saw it to be on the whole for the best ; or, if it seemed good in his sight. But the reasons of his conduct in this case, as in many others, are known only to his own infinite mind. As to us,—we see through a glass darkly ; we know only in part. But what we know not now, we may know hereafter. The development of the divine character which will be made during the ten thousand ages to come, will cast a clearer light on the divine plan, and help us more adequately to understand its wisdom and goodness. Let us modestly suspend our judgment, and wait till that clearer light shines.

But you seem to apprehend certain dreadful consequences, if

God should convert one sinner more than he does. You say, (Appendix, 13,) "Had God prevented the sins of one human being to the present time, or had he brought to repentance one sinner more than he has; who can prove that the requisite interposition for the purpose would not result in a vast increase of sin in the system, including even the apostacy and augmented guilt of that individual?" You ask, who can prove that it would *not* result in this? And I ask, who can prove that it *would*? What shadow of reason is there to suppose that it would? "The requisite interposition" seems to you to be something dark and terrific,—something which might prove exceedingly dangerous to the order and happiness of the moral world. But in sober truth, what is that divine interposition, of which you have such apprehensions? It is merely this; that God, in great mercy, and by the effectual operation of his Spirit, should turn the sinner from darkness to light, should make him pure in heart, and incline him to love and obey the gospel. This is the interposition which has been requisite in the case of every sinner who has been converted. Now has this divine interposition ever produced such an effect as you apprehend? Has it resulted "in a vast increase of sin in the system, and in the apostacy and augmented guilt of the individual converted?" I hold that the infinite grace of God in converting sinners never has produced, and never has had the least tendency to produce such a result, but the contrary,—directly the contrary. Is not the conversion of every sinner inseparably connected by the appointment of God, with his perseverance in holiness, and his final salvation? And has it not an obvious tendency to check the progress of wickedness in the world? As then, in all the instances in which God has converted sinners from the beginning of the world to the present time, "the requisite interposition" has led to no such result; what reason have you to suppose that it would lead to such a result in any other case, and that God is prevented from converting more sinners than he does, because he sees, (or perhaps more properly, because he *fears*,) that their conversion would *result in a vast increase of sin in the system, including the apostacy and augmented guilt of those very individuals?* And as in every instance of conversion in past times, the result has been contrary to this; what reason have you to doubt that it might be so in every other instance?

I will just remark, that if God had only the kind of power which

man has, and if he could effect no more radical change, than the fear of punishment or the desire of happiness can produce; then indeed might his interference be ineffectual, and saints might apostatize and perish, notwithstanding all he could do to prevent.

Thus far the view I have taken of the subject is chiefly negative. But I shall not stop here, as there is, if I mistake not, *direct, positive, and conclusive proof*, that God *has* power to convert and save any one, or any number of those sinners, who will in fact perish in impenitence. This proof I shall now adduce.

First. God is *omnipotent*. This implies, that he can do all his pleasure; that he can accomplish whatever he wishes to accomplish; that he can direct, as he pleases, all the external circumstances of moral beings, and all the springs of action within them, and can form their characters according to his will. The omnipotence of God implies, that he can do every thing which is an object of power, every thing to which power appertains, or to the accomplishment of which power is to be applied.

That the conversion of a sinner is an object of power, and that to the accomplishment of it power is and must be applied, there can be no room for doubt. To this divine attribute the renewal of the heart is ascribed in the Scriptures. And this power, though some may choose to call it *physical*, is real and necessary. It is that power which certainly produces the *effect* intended, that is, *gives the sinner a new heart and a new spirit*; and surely the name does not alter the thing. That this effectual power of God in the renewal of a sinner does not violate moral agency, is, I should think, sufficiently apparent from the broad fact, *that in all the instances in which it has accomplished this gracious work, moral agency has been entirely uninjured and undisturbed*. God has frequently made very high and glorious displays of his power in the renovation of sinners,—a power which has subdued the most violent enmity, has overcome the most obstinate resistance, has melted the greatest hardness; a power like that which raises the dead. And yet, in all this, there never has been the smallest degree, no, nor the smallest *appearance* of any injury to moral agency. And if God has thus effectually exerted his power in all instances of conversion, in a manner perfectly suited to the intellectual and moral faculties of man, and without any infringement of the principles of moral agency; I am quite unable to see why he cannot do the same in any

other instance, when he pleases. And I cannot but think there are special reasons, why *moral agency*, the operations of which are so important, yea, so essential to the interests of the universe, should not be placed beyond God's control.

But in regard to the question, whether the conversion of sinners is properly an object of power, I shall appeal directly to the Scriptures, and inquire how the inspired writers treat the subject.

The following passage, (Ephes. 1: 15—20,) is worthy of special notice. The Apostle says to the Christians at Ephesus; "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ—may give you the spirit of wisdom, etc.—that ye may know what is the hope of his calling—and what is *the exceeding greatness of his power* toward us who believe, according to the working of *his mighty power*, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, etc." The Apostle here signified, that *very great divine power* had been exercised towards believers, i. e. in renewing them and bringing them to believe;—a power which he compared to the working of that *mighty power* which raised Christ from the dead. And another Apostle teaches, that believers are "kept by *the power of God* through faith unto salvation." 1 Pet. 1: 5. Thus both the commencement and the continuance of holiness in the redeemed is effected by *divine power*, and the former of these by *the exceeding greatness* of divine power.

I shall refer to one passage more (Mark 10: 27). Jesus had represented the salvation of the rich, as exceedingly difficult. His disciples, greatly astonished at the representation, said, "who then can be saved? But Jesus, looking upon them, said; with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." He said this, it will be observed, in reference to the salvation of sinners,—of those whose salvation was most difficult,—of those too, who generally were not saved. Jesus declared, as you will observe, that it was *possible* for God to save, or that he *could* save even rich sinners, (though but few of them were actually saved,) and that he *could* save them, because he was *omnipotent*; or, as Christ expressed it, "because all things were possible with him." Being *omnipotent*, he was *able* to save those referred to, whether they were saved, or not.

I think you cannot but notice here some difference between

what our Saviour taught, and the doctrine of your note. Your doctrine is, as I understand it, that it is *impossible* for God to save one sinner more than he does. But Christ, speaking of a class of men, who generally are not saved, says, it is *not* impossible for God to save them. Again, you say; “Had God’s *creatures* done what *they* could, then indeed there had been more holiness and less sin. But what could *God* have done to secure such a result?” Christ said, such a thing was *impossible* with *men*, but *possible* with *God*. Whereas you say, it is *possible* with *men*, but *impossible* with *God*.

My second argument to prove that God has power to convert those sinners who are not converted, is derived from the plain fact, that *God has converted others*.—Take sinners of the ordinary character, to whom salvation is offered, but who will in fact remain impenitent and perish. Is God *able* to convert them? *Can* he do it? This is the question. I suppose you hold the negative. If you do not, your language does not clearly express your views. I shall maintain the affirmative, and shall do it here by this short and simple argument, namely; *God has converted other sinners; therefore he has power to convert these*;—just as we prove that God has power, when he pleases, to raise the dead, from the fact that, in various instances, he *has* done it. As to the power of raising the dead, this proof from fact is perfectly conclusive, unless there is some hindrance to the resurrection of those whom God might wish to raise, which did not exist in the case of any who have been raised, and unless this hindrance is so great, that omnipotence cannot overcome it. The same in reference to the case now before us. That the unchangeable God *can* convert the sinners above supposed, is perfectly evident from the fact that he has converted others; unless the conversion of these is attended with some difficulty, which has never attended the conversion of others, and which omnipotence itself cannot overcome. But what can this new difficulty be? Difficulties many and great have been overcome. Pride, selfishness, hardness of heart, yea, sin of every kind, and every degree, (with only one exception,) has, in numberless instances, been subdued by the power of God’s Spirit. And can it be supposed, that the sinners now in view have greater pride, selfishness, or hardness of heart, than any of those whom divine grace has saved? Have not some of the chief of sinners been converted? And is not that Almighty Spirit, which converted *them*, able to convert *these*?

There can be no doubt in the present case as to the sufficiency of *the means*, (spoken of by some as God's *moral power*). For God has the same means of converting these sinners, as of converting those who are saved. And in particular, he has that which you consider so important and efficacious, namely, "the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin." For thousands of years sin has existed, and been openly punished; and the more dreadful punishment, which awaits it in another world, has been clearly revealed. This mighty influence, together with the influence of the whole system of truths made known by the Scriptures, God has perfectly at command, and can use, according to the good pleasure of his will, for the conversion of all who enjoy the light of the gospel. He has, in thousands of instances, found a small part of these means sufficient. And where they are all enjoyed, can it still be, that God is unable to convert sinners for want of "*moral power*?"

My third argument to prove, that God is able to convert sinners whom he does not convert, is, that *we are required to pray for their conversion*.

All rational prayer evidently implies, that we believe in God's power to do what we ask him to do. Should we consider God as unable to do a particular thing, or even doubt his ability to do it; how could we consistently make it a subject of prayer? In such a case, our prayer would at best be like the request of the man, who brought his distressed child to Jesus, and, with a sad mixture of unbelief with faith, said; "If thou *canst* do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." We may indeed ask God for many things which are in themselves desirable, though we may not know that he can grant them consistently with his infinite wisdom. So Jesus prayed that his Father would take away the cup, if it were possible; that is, if it could be done consistently with his holy will. Asking God to do what is not expressly promised, with an ultimate reference of our request to his sovereign will, is an expression of filial confidence. But with what a timid, half-despairing spirit should we offer up our petitions to God, if we thought he might not have *power* to grant them? After the Apostle Paul had asked for the most precious blessings for the Ephesians, his exalted views of the divine character led him to conclude thus: "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think

—unto him be glory in the church.” But such views as you seem to entertain, would lead us to fear, that we might ask for more than God was able to perform, and when we had freely expressed our desires to him, to add, instead of the joyful ascription of the Apostle, the discouraging qualification ;—Grant these desires, O Lord, *if thou canst* ; save the sinners around us, *if thou hast sufficient moral power* ; turn them from sin and give them a new heart, *if thou art able*. With such a chilling apprehension as this,—with the doubt resting on our minds, whether God had *power* to accomplish what we might most ardently desire, and what he too might desire and know to be on the whole best ; how could we attain to that spirit of prayer, and that high confidence in God, exhibited by Prophets and Apostles ?

My fourth argument in support of the same position, is, *that the sacred writers often speak of the conversion of sinners as depending on the WILL, COUNSEL, or PLEASURE of God*, but never as depending on the condition of his having sufficient *power* to convert them.

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, says ; “ God hath mercy on whom he *will* have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” Not a word signifying that God had no *power* to do otherwise, or that the only thing he *could* do, was either not to create moral agents, or to leave such a part of them to perish in sin. If the Apostle had imbibed such an opinion as yours, this, I should suppose, would have been the very place for him to declare it. As he found it necessary to meet the objection which unbelievers urged against the conduct of God in saving some and leaving others to perish ; how natural and convenient might it have been for him to say ; who can complain of God on this account, when he has done all that he *could* for the salvation of every human being ? But the Apostle treats the subject very differently, and makes the impression strongly on our minds, that God’s having mercy on some and not on others, was a matter of sovereign choice ; that he proceeded in this concern according to his own *will*. Instead of questioning the power of God, he takes pains to illustrate that power, and God’s right to use it as he pleased, by a striking similitude. “ Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor ? ”—implying that God’s converting or not converting sinners depends on his sovereign pleasure. The Apostle in other places teaches, that God calls and saves men ac-

according to *the counsel of his own will*. But when does he intimate that God is prevented from converting sinners by want of power?—that he *would* convert them, if he *could*?—or that he does not renew them by the Holy Spirit, because he *cannot*? It seems to me, that your theory, as commonly understood, must lead those who embrace it, to differ widely from the Scriptures in their manner of treating the divine administration in regard to the conversion of sinners; and, as I suggested before, to offer just such an apology for God, as we sometimes make for a weak, imperfect man, when he has done all the good he *could*, though not so much as he *wished*.

LETTER VI.

FARTHER notice of the question, whether God *could* have secured the holiness of any moral being without the influence of moral evil. The doctrine of moral necessity applied to the subject.—The position, *that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good*, particularly considered.—A contradiction. Proper inference from the fact, that God makes use of sin as a means of preserving moral beings in holiness. Same reasoning in regard to the other phrase, *i. e. sin so far as it exists preferable to holiness in its stead*. Meaning of the expression, sin is, in respect to divine prevention, incidental to the best moral system.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I have a few additional remarks to offer on a subject which has already been brought into view in the preceding Letters. You say, (Appendix, 13,) “ We know of no creature of God, whose holiness is secured without that influence, which results—from the existence of sin and its punishment.” In reply to this, I have referred to the “ first estate” of the angels who fell, which was a state of holiness. It appears then that those angels who are now happy in heaven, were, for a time, preserved in holiness, without the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin. Even at the very time when others fell, they were preserved without that influence; for, evidently, that influence must have followed both the existence and the punishment of sin. My argument is, that as he did this for a season, he could have done it longer, even to the present time, had he judged it on the whole best. And the argument I think conclusive, unless we are at liberty to suppose something in their character or state, which rendered it more difficult for God to preserve them holy afterwards, than during the first period of their existence; and so much more difficult, that omnipotence itself could not preserve them, without the help of additional means. But is any thing

like this supposeable? Can we imagine that their character or state after a while became such, and that God could not prevent its becoming such, as to render higher power, and more efficacious means necessary to their preservation; a power too which God himself could not exercise, and means which he could not command? Is there any reason to think that the experience they had of the goodness of God and the happiness of serving him, rendered them less inclined to serve him?—that the exercise of love weakened the habit of love?—that by their residence in heaven they became less and less attached to the place, and at length came so near to a state of disaffection, that the Almighty himself had no way to hold them to their allegiance, except by resorting to a new set of means, and displaying before them the terrific consequences of sin?

Say, if you please, that in the progress of the moral system, new circumstances of temptation might arise. But could not God either prevent those circumstances from occurring; or keep his exposed servants at a distance from them; or shield their minds effectually against an influence which endangered their purity? Could he not have done as much in relation to them, as your Reviewers say he could have done in relation to our first parents; that is, prevented the access of temptation, or by a divine influence prevented their yielding to it? (Christian Spect. 1829, p. 381.)

Be it so, that God saw it to be on the whole best, to make use of the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin, in preserving and increasing the holiness of angels. Does this prove that he had not power to do it without that influence? Because the way which God has actually chosen to promote the holiness of his creatures is the *wisest* and *best*, are we hence to conclude that it is the only way *possible*?

It is a part of the doctrine of *moral necessity*, as taught by Edwards and others, that moral actions are *effects* resulting from their proper causes; that these causes and the manner of their operation depend ultimately on God; and that, in perfect accordance with the laws of moral agency, he can excite moral beings to such affections and actions as he pleases. According to this doctrine, the connexion between cause and effect is as certain and uniform in the moral world, as in the natural; (although the *nature* of cause and effect in the one case is totally different from what it is in the other.) In both cases, where all the causes or previous circumstances are per-

fectly the same, the effect will be the same. 'This principle, which I think intuitively certain, may supply a proper answer to the following question in your *Concio ad Clerum* (p. 30). You say to the person whom you address ;—"Suppose God had made you just like Adam, or even like Lucifer, and placed you in similar circumstances ; do you know that you would not have sinned as he did ?" The answer I give to this question is, that any one would undoubtedly have done as Adam or as Lucifer did, had he been made just like him, and placed in circumstances perfectly similar. But why confine the supposition to such a case ? Instead of making the being in question just like Adam or Lucifer, suppose God had made him just like *Gabriel*, and placed him in precisely the same circumstances, and under the influence of the same causes ; can any one doubt that he would have acted as Gabriel did ? And may not the individual, whose objections you have attempted to remove, still demand of you the reason, why a God of infinite benevolence did not give him such a nature, and place him in such circumstances, as to secure him from apostacy ?

You have seen that I do not undertake to solve the various difficulties, which have been found to attend the existence of moral evil. And when I consider that this subject has in all ages perplexed the minds of the greatest philosophers and theologians, and has often been acknowledged by the most intelligent men to be involved in inscrutable mystery ; I confess myself slow to believe that it can be so easily cleared up, as some imagine. I should certainly think it presuming in me to suppose, that I had discovered or could discover a solution, which had escaped so many distinguished and patient inquirers ; and still more presuming, to confide in any theory of my own as perfectly valid, which stood in opposition to the faith of the great body of ministers and Christians through the world. Whether the theory which you have introduced is valid, and affords a satisfactory solution of the difficulties attending the subject, is a question which I have endeavoured to examine, and on which the public will decide.

The two positions, which you call "very common but groundless assumptions," have already been stated. I have particularly attended to the second of these, and to the position which I have consider-

ed you as maintaining in opposition to it. I now proceed to the consideration of the other position.

You regard it as a very common, but groundless assumption, *that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, and that as such, so far as it exists, it is preferable on the whole to holiness in its stead.* As you reject the position that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, you doubtless hold that it is *not*; and accordingly you suggest a variety of reasons to support this position, and to confute to common one.

It would be uncandid in me to suppose, that there was any thing designedly enigmatical in what you have written on this point; or that in addition to a meaning which is obvious, you have another which is concealed, or almost concealed. In my remarks, therefore, I shall proceed on the supposition, that the meaning which your words have conveyed to my mind, and to the minds of others generally, is the meaning you intended to convey.

And here the first thing which must occur to the minds of your readers is, *that in the latter part of your note, you assert and take pains to prove the very point which in the former part you deny.*

In my reasoning on this subject, I shall not in every instance repeat the whole of what you call the first groundless assumption; because this would be unnecessary and cumbersome; and because the different phrases are of nearly the same import; and your own method is, to take one or the other of them, as the turn of thought or expression seems to render convenient.

The position to which I now refer, and which I suppose you to deny in the first part, and affirm in the second part of your note, is, *that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good.*

You say, (Appendix, 13,) "We know of no creature of God whose holiness is secured without the influence which results, either directly or indirectly, from the existence of sin and its punishment. How then can it be proved from facts that God *could* secure any of his moral creatures in holiness without this influence?" Now to say, that no creature of God *is* or *could* be preserved in holiness without the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin, is clearly the same as to say, that the existence and punishment of sin is the *necessary means* of securing any one in holiness. So, if we should say, there is no man who could live without the influence of air, our meaning would be, that air is the *necessary*

means of human life.—The next step is equally sure. If, as you maintain, the existence and punishment of sin is the necessary means of preserving any of God's creatures in holiness; then the existence and punishment of sin is the necessary means of the *greatest good*: for the greatest good most certainly requires, that some of God's creatures should be preserved in a state of holiness.

Thus your reasoning in the latter part of the note, is really a confutation,—and if it were only from another writer, I should say, a *direct* and *studied* confutation, of what you advance in the former part. You first maintain that sin is *not* the necessary means of the greatest good; and then you maintain that the holiness of intelligent creatures, which you certainly regard as involved in the greatest good, could not in any instance, no, not even by the power of God, be preserved without the existence and punishment of sin. *There*, sin is *not* the necessary means of the greatest good; *here*, sin, by its existence and punishment, *is* the *necessary, indispensable means* of that holiness of God's creatures, in which the greatest good essentially consists.

But my conclusion does not depend on the single passage above quoted; but on the language and the argument extending through a great part of the paragraph. You ask, “Do not all known facts furnish a strong presumption to the contrary?”—that is, a strong presumption against the supposition, that God could prevent sin in any of his creatures without the influence arising from its existence and punishment in others. This is as much as to say, and to say emphatically, that all facts prove the existence and punishment of sin to be the *necessary means* of preserving any of God's creatures in holiness, and so, of course, the necessary means of the *greatest good*. You say too; “If God *could* prevent *all* sin without this influence, why has he not done it?” The question clearly shows what was in the mind of the writer, namely; that if God had not regarded the existence and punishment of sin as the necessary means of preventing sin in the great body of moral beings, and so of promoting the greatest good; he would have done without it. “If he *could* prevent all sin without this influence, why has he not done it?” Again, in the next sentence, you ask; “Who is competent to foretell the consequences of the least iota of change in the present system of influence to produce holiness and prevent sin?”—clearly intimating that the influence arising from the existence and punish-

ment of sin, which you consider an essential part of the present system of influence, is the *necessary means* of guarding against the most fearful consequences, and of accomplishing the best ends ; and so that the least change of the system of influence in this respect would be of fatal tendency ; that is, *sin, yea, all the sin that exists*, (for there must not be the least iota of change,) *is absolutely necessary to the greatest good.*

The Reviewer of Taylor and Harvey, (Christian Spectator for June 1829,) appears to concur in the same opinions. He says, (p. 330,) "If they" (that is, moral beings) "are kept from sinning, it is not because they *cannot* sin, but because obedience is their choice. Do we know that there must not, in the nature of the case, be a display of the feelings and determinations of God in regard to sin, *as actually committed*, in order to the exertion of that moral influence, by which alone creatures who *can* sin, will, in all the circumstances of their being, remain obedient ? We do know that the only wise God has taken occasion from sin to accumulate the influences of his moral government upon the minds both of angels and men, ever since time began.—The existence of this evil is presupposed in the system by which God is displaying himself in his brightest glories, to the view of both angels and men, and bringing the whole weight of his character to bear upon their minds, to secure their obedience.—And do we know of any other way in which the apostacy of the subjects of a moral government *could* have been prevented ?"

"These thoughts," continues the Reviewer, "are not new. Dr Dwight says, *how far the fall and punishment of some moral beings may, in the nature of the case, be indispensably necessary to the persevering obedience of the great body, cannot be determined by us.*"

I have not introduced the views expressed in these passages, for the sake of controverting them ; for I consider them for the most part correct ; but for the sake of confirming the construction which I have put upon the expressions quoted from your note. It would be difficult for me to conceive of any language, which would more clearly set forth the *necessity* of moral evil in order to promote the greatest good, than that which I have now cited from the Review. First, it is signified, rather cautiously, and by implication, that there *must* be a display of God's feelings in regard to sin, *as actually committed*, in order to the exertion of that moral influence which is

necessary to preserve moral agents in a state of obedience. But cautious as the language is, it shows satisfactorily that the Reviewer considers the existence of moral evil as the *nesessary means* of promoting that obedience of intelligent creatures, which is certainly implied in the greatest good. But he proceeds to say; "The existence of this evil is presupposed in the system by which God is displaying himself in his brightest glories, etc." This clearly is as much as to say, it is presupposed in the system by which God will secure *the grcatest good*. The Reviewer finally waxes bolder, and says; "do we know of any other way in which the apostacy of the subjects of a moral government *could* have been prevented?"—implying that the existence of moral evil is, so far as we know, the necessary and only effectual means of preserving moral beings in a state of holiness, and of course, the necessary means of promoting the *greatest good*. And the quotation is made from Dr. Dwight for the very purpose of giving countenance to the idea, that the existence of sin may be *indispensably necessary* to that persevering obedience of the great body of moral beings, which constitutes so essential a part of the highest good of the system.

The contradiction would, I think, be equally striking, should we take the second clause of what you consider the first groundless assumption, and compare it with what you have written in the latter part of your note. I understand you in the first place to deny, that *sin, so far as it exists, is preferable on the whole to holiness in its stead*; and my allegation is, that after denying this, you impliedly affirm it, and represent *sin, so far as it exists, as preferable on the whole to holiness in its stead*. When you speak of sin *so far as it exists*, I suppose you speak of it in reference to the particular instances in which it has actually occurred. Now all the sin which exists in the universe, so far as we know, is the sin of a part of the angels, and the sin of man. This therefore we may properly call, *sin so far as it exists*. Concerning this actually existing sin, we are to inquire, whether it is *on the whole preferable to holiness in its stead*. Your representations imply that it is. In various ways you show it to be your opinion, that it was impossible for *any* beings, and certainly for the great body of moral beings, to be preserved holy, without the influence of sin. It is implied in your statements, that if man, and the angels who sinned, had been preserved from sin, a dreadful rebellion must have broken out in some other

part of the universe. The fair question would then be, whether it is better on the whole, that sin should exist in that part, that small part of the moral creation, where it has taken place, and be made the means of effectually preserving all the rest; or that God, by a peculiar effort of his omnipotence, should prevent sin in that small part, and thereby expose the rest, that is, the great body of moral beings, to certain ruin; or perhaps, according to your views, expose the *whole* to certain ruin, in the end: for you hold that *none* could be preserved from apostacy without the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin. Now you doubtless think, as your remarks imply, that as sin, which is in itself a great evil, *must* exist in a moral system, it is very important that it should be confined within as narrow limits as possible, and that it is far preferable it should exist with all its dreadful consequences, in a small part of the system, that is, just "*so far as it does exist*," than that holiness should in the same part exist in its stead, and sin and perdition reign, as you think they would, through all the other parts, and finally through this part too, of God's mighty empire. You think it very important, that God should *secure the greatest degree of holiness, and the least degree of sin, which is possible*. And as the sin which has actually occurred in a part of the system is, as you hold, an indispensable means, under the government of God, of preserving the great body of moral beings in a state of holiness; this sin (that is, "sin so far as it exists") will, under the divine government, have such an influence, as to secure in the end the greatest degree of holiness and the least degree of sin. Whereas, if God had interposed to prevent the sin which now exists in a part of the system, and to secure holiness in its stead; the result would have been,—certainly *might* have been, exceedingly hurtful to the universe; because on supposition of "the least iota of change in the present system of influence," and especially on supposition of *such* a change, God might, according to your scheme, have been unable to *secure the greatest degree of holiness and the least degree of sin which was possible in the nature of things*. And this is the same as saying, that the sin which now exists, or sin so far as it exists, being the necessary means of the greatest good, is, in that view, preferable to holiness in its stead. And it is clearly your apprehension, if your Reviewer has understood you right, that this preferableness of sin in a part of the system, considered as a means of guarding

against a larger amount of sin in the whole, was the very reason why God did not interpose to prevent it. For, according to the Reviewer, your scheme "supposes that in a moral system, God could have prevented each sin, individually considered;" which implies, that he could have prevented the sin of each angel, and the sin of each man. But he says, your scheme supposes also, that the arrangement which would have been necessary to accomplish this "might have been connected with a greater amount of sin in the general result;"—as much as to say, that in the particular instances in which sin actually exists, it is preferable to holiness in its stead, as it will be the means of preventing a greater amount of sin in the general result; and that God, regarding it in this light, and knowing what an arrangement was necessary to preserve men and angels from committing it, did not make that arrangement; though he would have decidedly chosen to make it, had he not apprehended such an unhappy result.

Here consider a moment how all this is consistent with that remarkable passage in your note; "Had God's creatures done what *they* could, then indeed there had been more holiness and less sin. But the question is, what could *God* have done to secure such a result?" Suppose now God's creatures *had* done what you signify they could have done, and had all chosen to be holy. What then? why then, they would all have *been* holy, and been so without the influence of sin, and would thus have proved that to be possible which you say is impossible, and would have proved too, according to your theory, that God's creatures can do, what he cannot.

This then appears to be the true state of the case. In one part of your note you *reject* the position, that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good; in another part of the same note, you *maintain* this position; laboring with great zeal, to show that sin *is* the necessary means of the greatest good, as no moral agents *could* be preserved in a state of holiness without its existence and punishment. And this is confirmed by the Reviewer, who holds, in perfect accordance with your note, that there must be a display of God's feelings towards sin, *as actually existing*, in order that his creatures may, in all the circumstances of their being, be influenced to remain obedient.

But I have here a few additional remarks. That the Gover-

nour of the world does actually make use of moral evil as a means of preserving his creatures in a state of holiness, is a fact which I admit as fully as you do. What I intend to say is, that this is *one* means among *many*. And when we find that God actually makes use of this means; what is the just conclusion? That he had not *power* to influence them to obedience by other means? This does not follow at all. What then does follow from the fact that God makes use of moral evil as one means of influencing moral agents to obedience? It follows, that God saw it to be *proper* to do so; that it was a mode of influence which in the exercise of his wisdom he chose,—chose in preference to using other means of influence exclusively of this,—chose, not because he was *unable* to preserve his creatures holy by other means without this, but because he saw it to be wisest and best, on the whole, to make use of this means in connexion with others. It follows, that making use of moral evil, in connexion with other means, was a mode of government, which God, taking all things into view, judged to be better than any other,—more honorable to his character, and more conducive, on the whole, to the good of his universal kingdom. This I think is the just, and the only just conclusion from the fact. When God does a thing, we know that thing to be right. When he does a thing in a particular way, we know that way to be wise and proper. When he does it in that way in preference to other ways, which might appear to us desirable; we conclude, not that he was *unable* to do it in those other ways, but that, for good reasons, unknown perhaps to us, he judged this to be a better way.

It is undoubtedly the case that God will, on the whole, promote a higher amount of holiness and happiness in his moral empire by means of moral evil, than could have been promoted without it. But this does not imply, that God was *unable* to exclude sin entirely from a moral system, and that he was, as you seem to think, absolutely shut up to the alternative of having *no moral system*, or the one which now exists. The infinite mind of God might surely conceive of systems beyond our power of numbering, all possible to his omnipotence, and all good in higher or lower degrees; and many of these might be systems which should exclude all sin, and contain certain degrees of good, unmingled with evil. And even in respect to a system originally constructed like the present; might

it not be possible in God's view, that it should be so managed, or be under such an administration, that it should be wholly free from natural and moral evil, and in this way secure a certain amount of holiness and happiness? Might not many methods of administration in such a system as this originally was, be equally possible to God, and equally possible in themselves? And so, humanly speaking, might not God have a choice among a great variety of ways in which he was able to manage such a system, all of which ways might be in different degrees good; and might not God see that the particular mode of proceeding which he actually adopted, was better than any other;—that it was suited to make a more glorious display of his attributes; and though it would not entirely exclude evil, would ultimately raise his kingdom to a higher degree of holiness and happiness, than any other? In this view might not God actually prefer it, and fix upon it? And would not this be a choice worthy of God?

There is a particular expression in your note, to which you seem to attach more than ordinary consequence. You say, God may “purpose sin though wholly an evil, considered as *incidental*, so far as his power of prevention is concerned, to the best moral system.” So in the sermon, you speak with approbation of the “supposition, that the evil which exists is, *in respect to the divine prevention*, incidental to the best possible system.” Not a few have found this language to be of difficult interpretation. I shall here endeavour to ascertain its meaning.

To say that a particular evil is *incidental*, or *incident*, to a man, is to say, that *it may happen to him*, unless prevented by special means; that he is *liable* to it; is *exposed* to *suffer* it, if a natural evil,—to *commit* it, if a moral evil. Thus we say, disease or pain is *incident* to human nature at every period of life,—not implying that it *certainly will come* upon human nature at every period of life, or that it cannot *possibly* be prevented; but that human nature is such as, in ordinary circumstances, to be *liable* to it. It is often the case that evils which are *incident* to man, are in fact prevented. Their being *incident* to man, is one thing; their actual occurrence, another. When therefore it is said, “sin is *incidental* to the best moral system,” I suppose the meaning must be, that the best moral system is *liable* to it, and that, unless specially prevented, it may take place. Its being *incidental*, cannot mean that it

certainly will occur. The very phrase seems to imply that it may not take place! and so that its taking place; or not taking place, will not prevent the moral system from being the best.

We come now to the other phrase, "so far as God's power of prevention is concerned." I might here ask, why you speak of God's power of prevention, when you maintain that he has no such power at all? I have sometimes thought that, instead of the language, "sin is incidental to the best moral system, *so far as God's power of prevention is concerned*," the expression might have been, that sin is incidental, *notwithstanding* any power in God to prevent. But then the question would arise; to prevent what? The natural construction would seem to be, to prevent sin *from being incidental*. But this cannot be your meaning. From the current of your remarks I conclude, that God's power of prevention must be intended to relate, not to sin's being *incidental*, but to its actual occurrence. And if so, the sense intended might perhaps be conveyed in some such language as this; the best moral system is liable to sin, and the omnipotence of God cannot prevent its occurrence,—or, it may actually take place *notwithstanding* his omnipotence. I am confirmed in this construction by various things in your note.

Now it is desirable to make every subject as plain and simple as possible, and for this purpose to lay aside whatever needs no discussion. The fact that sin is, in a general sense, *incidental* to moral beings in a state of trial, or that they are *liable* to sin, is admitted by all. This therefore may be laid out of the question. The question, and the only one which claims attention here, is, whether God has power to prevent moral beings from actually committing sin. And to this I have particularly attended in the previous discussion.

I have one remark in addition. If you are here speaking of that which is in itself contradictory, and which is not an object of power; then why should you say any thing about God's *power of prevention*? In respect to any subject which involved a contradiction, you surely would not speak in this manner. You would not say, the whole of a thing is greater than a part, *so far as God's power of prevention is concerned*, or notwithstanding any power in God to prevent. Nor would you say, holiness is different from sin, or happiness is different from misery, *so far as God's power of prevention is concerned*. Or if you should speak in this manner, it would be difficult to know your meaning.

LETTER VII.

Whether the common position is consistent with the fact that sin is forbidden, and punished ; and with the sincerity of God. Can a person sin with a benevolent intention ? Case of the Canaanites. Objection of the caviller, Rom. III. Dr Taylor's scheme does not remove difficulties. Virtue founded in utility. Intimation that the orthodox consider sin to be excellent in its nature. Whether the common scheme admits of sorrow for sin. We must regard sin as it is in itself. Distinction between God's agency and man's. Benevolent intention of the sinner. Intention of the sinner and of God distinguished. Conduct of Joseph's brethren, and death of Christ. Results of the theory in relation to Christ's death.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

IN the present Letter I shall go into a brief examination of your reasoning respecting what you call the first common but groundless assumption. (See Appendix, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.)

The object of your remarks in the part of your note here referred to, is, to make it appear that the common position of the Orthodox is inconsistent with the benevolence and sincerity of God, with his commands and invitations, and with the duty of sorrowing for sin.

In your remarks on these subjects I feel a very deep, and, I must say, painful interest, on account of their practical nature and tendency. It affords me however some satisfaction to learn, that not a few of those, who have been inclined to favor your speculations on other points, dissent from you on this, and look upon your reasoning as without any force, and of dangerous tendency.

It is obviously your opinion, and one in which all orthodox Christians will readily unite with you, that the *prohibition* and *punishment* of sin is necessary to give it a salutary influence in the mor-

al world. Sin in its own nature is evil, and as such must be prohibited by the divine law, and, if committed, must be punished. Its being prohibited by law, and punished according to law, is all that gives it a salutary influence, or makes it the occasion of good. Unlike holiness, which, in its own proper nature, is good and of salutary tendency, sin, in itself, is evil, and directly tends to evil, and becomes the means or occasion of good only *indirectly*, from the manner in which it is treated, that is, its being *forbidden* and *punished*. To this view I have no doubt you will fully assent. Now God's law respects sin, *as it is in itself*, or *in its own nature and tendency*. He forbids it, because it is a *wrong* and *hurtful* thing in a moral agent. As sin is in truth totally wrong, hateful, and pernicious; God would not treat it *according to truth*, he would not treat it according to his own feelings respecting it, he would not treat it *sincerely*, if he did not forbid it by his law, or if he did not punish it, when committed. It must be evident then, that whenever we represent sin as on the whole for the best, or, according to your manner of speaking, as having an influence by which moral beings are preserved in a state of holiness; we represent it, not as it is, taken *by itself*, but *as treated in the divine government*,—as *forbidden, frowned upon, punished*. When let alone, or left to itself, its whole influence and tendency is directly and violently opposed to the good of the universe, or to the holiness and happiness of moral beings; and it is only when condemned by God's holy law, and controlled and punished by his almighty providence, that any good can come out of this essential and destructive evil. It is God's righteous government respecting sin, which counteracts its natural tendency, and prevents the pernicious effects which it would of itself produce.

To all this I should have supposed you would entirely agree, did you not seem to oppose it by various objections. You say, "If such is the nature of God, of man, etc. that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good; ought it not to be made the subject of precept—would it not be, by a benevolent moral Governour?" By this I understand you to mean *that if the common theory is true, sin ought to be required*;—an objection to the common orthodox theory which I have often heard from the adversaries of the truth, but never before from an orthodox minister.

With regard to this reasoning of yours, I remark, that if sin

were *required*, it could not be the means of the greatest good ; since all which now makes it so, would then be wanting. In this objection to the common theory, do you not overlook the great and obvious difference between the proper tendency of sin, considered in its own nature, and the influence which it is made to have by the divine government which opposes it ? Do you not overlook the broad distinction between the intention of the sinner, who means sin only for evil, and the intention of God, who means it for good, and who, by his righteous administration, brings good out of it ? (See Gen. 50: 26.) What validity then is there in the objection ?

You next suggest a difficulty,—and you make it a very plausible one,—as to the *sincerity* of God in forbidding what he sees to be on the whole for the best, and requiring what he sees would not be on the whole for the best. But, while I admit that sin, under the divine government will on the whole be for the best ; I hold that God could not possibly *be sincere* if he did not forbid it, and require the holiness which is opposed to it. For what is it to be *sincere* ? Is it not to speak and act according to one's real feelings ? And if God really looks upon sin as in its own nature a wrong and hateful thing, and if he really disapproves and hates it ; then, to maintain the character of *sincerity*, he must *show* his disapprobation and hatred of it, both in his law and administration ; that is ; he must *forbid* it, and *punish* it. His seeing that under his righteous government it will on the whole be for the best, and his determining to use his power and wisdom to make it so, do not alter its intrinsic nature, nor his *views* of it. Now sin is, in truth, a *wrong* and *hateful* thing ; and God will overrule it for good by making it appear to the universe, that it is what it is. Certainly, the God of heaven sees, that sin is an evil and abominable thing, and hostile to the interests of his kingdom, and as such, he forbids it in his law, and punishes it in his administration. His law can neither regard it nor forbid it in any other light. It cannot be, that the law should forbid the *good* which the divine government will cause to result from the existence of sin. This is entirely another matter. In his law God addresses us as moral beings, and requires or forbids particular actions as *good* or *bad* in *their own nature* ; shows us our province, as intelligent creatures ; points out our proper work, and our only work. It does not belong to us to assume the office of government, and guide the affairs of God's empire. He does not call us

to come up, and sit with him on the throne, to deliberate and judge as to the best system of the universe, to wield the sceptre, and by an act of omnipotence, to enduce good from evil. This is a work which God reserves to himself. What he requires of *us* is *duty*,—right feelings, and right actions. And in all this, is he not *sincere* and *true*? Does he not say what he means? Does he not in his own mind consider that to be our duty, which in his law he enjoins upon us as our duty? Does he not *mean* to require what he requires in his word? And does he not mean to reward or punish us, exactly according to his declarations? And if so, is he not *sincere* in the requisitions of his law?—But while God in his law, marks out the work which he requires of us, he does not tell us, that neither the highest glory of his character, nor the highest interest of his kingdom can possibly be promoted without our obedience. He does not tell us that our disobedience cannot be so overruled by his almighty providence, that, in its final results, it shall occasion great good to the universe. He does not tell us, as if conscious of weakness and dependence, that if we refuse to glorify him by our obedience, he must give up his glory as unattainable; or that, if we neglect to promote the good of his kingdom, that kingdom must be injured and ruined. Not a word of this. He does indeed plainly inform us how he requires us, as moral agents, to promote his glory and the good of his kingdom, that is, by loving and obeying him. This is the work which I have said he assigns to us. And he commands us to seek our own welfare and that of others, by accomplishing this work, and in no other way. But does this prove that he himself will not so treat sin in his government, as to make it on the whole for the best? How does it prove this? Suppose that he does make it the occasion of the greatest good? Is this to the credit of *sin*? Can this take away the evil of sin, and render it our duty to commit it, and make it proper that God should *require* us to commit it? That is, in a word, does God's holy act in *opposing* sin and demonstrating to the universe its evil and hateful nature, *take away* its evil nature, and make it a proper thing to be required as a duty?

At the final consummation, this subject, I apprehend, will be placed in a very clear light. It will then appear, that God's law, which pointed out our duty, was holy, just, and good; and that we were under the highest obligations to glorify his name and promote the welfare of his kingdom, by unceasing obedience. And it will

then be equally apparent, that, notwithstanding our disobedience, he took care to provide for his own glory and the good of his kingdom, and that he even made our disobedience a means of promoting that great object. It will then appear, that in order to accomplish his sovereign purpose to bring good out of evil, he did not judge it necessary or proper to contradict himself, to bend his law, and require us to do evil that good might come,—to sin that he might be glorified. And it will then appear too, that that mysterious administration, which caused the wrath of man to praise God, and made sin the means of the greatest good, resulted wholly from the wisdom and power of Jehovah, and that the undivided glory of it belongs to him forever.

But there is still another view to be taken of this subject. If we should be required to commit sin, because it is on the whole for the best, or because it is the necessary means of the greatest good ; we must evidently be required to sin, and must commit sin, *for the purpose* of promoting that good ; that is, we must be required *in committing sin*, to *aim* at that good. Accordingly, when you are speaking of the person who commits sin, and who is apprised that sin will on the whole be the means of the greatest good, you inquire how it would appear that he does not perform the act *from a benevolent intention*. Now could any thing be more singular, than such an inquiry?—*How does it appear, that the person who commits sin in such circumstances, does not perform the act from a benevolent intention?*—Why, to say that we are required to sin, or that we do sin, “with a benevolent intention,” that is, with a desire to promote the good of God’s kingdom, is the grossest of all absurdities. It is the same as to say, we are required to promote or that we aim to promote an object, by *opposing* it ; to seek to honor God by seeking to *dishonor* him ; to show our love to God by *hating* him ; to endeavour to advance the good of the universe by endeavouring to *destroy* it.

In illustration of what you say respecting our being required to commit sin, and committing it with a benevolent intention, you refer to the destruction of the Canaanites by the children of Israel. And I acknowledge the illustration would be in point, if the act of destroying the Canaanites had been required of them *as sin*, or if it had been in itself sinful. But as the fact was altogether different from this, the illustration entirely fails. And so it must be with ev-

ery example intended to illustrate so manifest an absurdity. Whereas numerous examples, such as the selling of Joseph into Egypt, the crucifixion of Christ, the martyrdom of the apostles, and other events of a similar kind, clearly illustrate the truth, that God overrules the sinful actions of men, which they intended only for evil, for the good of his kingdom, and that he suffered them to take place for this purpose.

Entertaining the views which I have above expressed on this subject, I know not how to account for it, that you should advance the opinions on which I have above remarked. I know not how you should adopt, or seem to adopt the views commonly entertained by those who hate the truth, and should signify, as you do, that if the existence of sin is on the whole for the best, God must *require* it in his law. In drawing this conclusion from the common doctrine, do you not take part, though I trust unintentionally, with the cavilling objector, noticed by the Apostle, Rom. III. ? The Apostle's doctrine evidently was, that the unbelief of some would not defeat the benevolent purpose and promise of God respecting his people, and that whatever men might do, he would vindicate his own character, and would even take occasion from their sins to glorify his truth and all his perfections the more. Now mark how the opposer reasons from this. "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God," that is, puts the greater lustre upon it, or displays it to greater advantage,—“what shall we say? Is not God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?”—that is; is not God unjust in punishing us for that sin, which serves as a foil to set off the glory of his righteousness, and gives occasion for brighter manifestations of his grace? —But the cavilling Jew, as the Apostle represents, pursues his reasoning still farther, and says: “If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?” That is; if the veracity of God hath displayed itself to greater advantage by means of my unbelief; where is the justice of my being punished for it?—“And not rather,—let us do evil that good may come?” That is, why should I not feel myself allowed and even justified in committing all manner of wickedness, to the end that more good may be done by bringing more glory to redound to God?

If the interpretation which I have given of these passages is correct; (and it agrees with that given by the most learned and pious

Expositors, and is indeed the only one which admits of any rational support;) then, so far as I can see, the case stands thus: the caviller objects, that if, according to the doctrine of Paul, sin conduces to the glory of God, (and so to the greatest good,) it is unjust that he should be condemned or punished for it; and you, on your part, object to the common doctrine of the orthodox, which I take to be the same as that of the Apostle, and you say, or seem to say, that if the sin of man is on the whole for the best, it ought not only to be exempt from punishment, but even *required* by the divine law. (See Appendix, 3—7.)

I find that I have met the objection which you urge against the common doctrine in somewhat the same manner with Scott. In his note on Rom. 3: 5—8, he says: "God will take occasion from the rebellion of all fallen creatures to display his own glorious perfections to the greater advantage; though the intention of transgressors and the natural tendency of their conduct are both diametrically contrary to it." He then represents the objector as reasoning thus: "Suppose the truth of God should be more abundantly manifested to his glory by any man's telling a lie; why should the liar be punished for giving occasion to the display of God's glory?" "Yet," he says, "every one must see that the lie thus told, was directly *contrary* to the truth of God, and merely the *occasion* of his displaying it; and the event could not deduct from the malignity of the lie." Again, he says: "The blame of men's sins belongs only to themselves; the honor of the good done by occasion of them, to God alone."

You have doubtless noticed the manner in which the Apostle meets the objection of the captious Jew. So far from allowing it to have any force, he seems scarcely to think it deserving of a sober refutation; and instead of spending time upon it, he dismisses it at once, after having put upon it the seal of absurdity and blasphemy.

I am well aware that you attach special importance to your scheme of thought, because you suppose that, by means of it, you avoid objections and difficulties. But I am unable to see how you avoid them. The same objection may, I think, be urged against you, as you urge against others. You hold that the existence and punishment of sin have an influence, without which no moral beings could be preserved in a state of rectitude,—an influ-

ence *indispensable* to the persevering holiness of any intelligent creatures, and of course indispensable to the highest good of the universe. The objector may say ; *if so, then why does not a benevolent God require sin in his law ?*—You hold, “ that God decrees all actual events, sin not excepted ;” that “ he really purposes the existence of sin.” The objector says ; *if so, then why does not God require it of his creatures ? Why does he not require of at least a part of them, that which, for wise and good ends, he purposes shall exist ? Why does he not require it in the same sense in which he decrees it ? And why does he not require us to execute that benevolent decree which appoints sin, by committing sin ?* To these questions, which are nearly of the same import with those which you suggest respecting the common theory, you will, if I mistake not, find it quite as difficult to give an answer on your scheme, as we on ours.

As to the opinion which seems to hold so prominent a place in your mind, that if God considered the existence of sin to be on the whole for the best, he could not consistently with his sincerity *forbid* it ;—it is clear that you may just as well say, if he considered sin to be on the whole for the best, he could not consistently *punish* it ;—(because he makes the same expression of his mind in *punishing* sin as he does in *forbidding* it.) Whereas, according to your own statement, the salutary influence of sin results from its punishment. But it results as really from its being *forbidden*, as from its being *punished*. And its being *forbidden* is so far from having any inconsistency with its being on the whole for the best, that it cannot *be* for the best,—cannot possibly have the good influence which God intends it shall have, *without* being *forbidden*, any more than it can without being *punished*.

You say, (Appendix, 5,) “ It is extensively maintained that virtue is founded in utility ; i. e. that such is the nature, relations, and tendencies of things, that greater happiness will result from virtue or holiness, than from vice or sin. How then can sin in the nature of things be the necessary means of the greatest good ?”—But as various representations of yours imply, that sin *is* the necessary means of the greatest good ; it belongs to you, as much as to your brethren, to show how it can be so. But the sentence above quoted overlooks a point of special importance. When we represent sin to be the means of the greatest good ; the representation cannot be

supposed to relate to the good of the individuals who commit it and endure its penalty, but to the good of other beings, who are benefited by witnessing its effects upon those individuals. Your question then appears to have no force. For suppose it to be the case, as it certainly is, that more happiness will result from holiness to those who are holy, than from sin to those who are sinners; may not the loss of sinners in such a case be the means of good to other moral beings who witness it? But you and your Reviewer have said so much as to the vast importance and the indispensable necessity of this kind of influence in a moral system, that I need not enlarge upon it here.

Let me here suggest again, that it certainly becomes us, weak and ignorant as we are, to remember that this is a profound and mysterious subject, and to guard against hastily embracing any views of God's character and works, different from those which have been embraced by the wisest and holiest of men in all ages. I cannot but feel, that my best views of the eternal God are exceedingly obscure, and fall infinitely below his supreme majesty and glory, and that I have great reason to make it my daily study and prayer, that I may rise to clearer and worthier conceptions of his invisible and incomprehensible excellence. Oh! come the blessed day, when the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shall shine more clearly in our hearts!

There is one passage in your note, (Appendix, 16,) at which I have been not a little surprised and grieved. In reference to those who embrace different opinions from yours, and in justification of your own theory, you say: "God may as really purpose sin, though wholly an evil, considered as incidental, so far as his power of prevention is concerned, to the best moral system, as purpose it *considered as so excellent in its nature and relations*, as to be the necessary means of the greatest good." Now, Dear Brother, who holds the opinion which you here oppose, and contrast with your own? Who among all the ministers and friends of Christ, especially among the orthodox ministers and Christians in this country, ever entertained an opinion so impious and shocking, as that God considered sin as "*excellent in its nature and relations*," or purposed it *as such*? Such a sentiment, I am bold to say, can be found in no orthodox writer, and must be instantly repelled by every pious heart. Why then, I ask, do you use language which certainly

implies, that this opinion is held by those, from whom you differ? If you really mean to convey this impression, then I am constrained to say, that no calumniator of the orthodox ever charged them more injuriously.

If you justify yourself by urging, that the *opinion or reasoning* of those from whom you differ, implies that sin is "excellent in its nature and relations," and that God considers it as such; my reply is, that their opinion or reasoning no more implies this, than yours. The only ground you can have for supposing that our opinions imply, *that sin is excellent in its nature and relations*, is our belief that, under the divine government, it is made the means of the greatest good. But this is clearly a belief which you entertain, or seem to entertain, as really as any of your brethren, and which you express more strongly and absolutely, than is common with them. Where is the justice then, of the language, against which I have above protested? As it now stands, we feel it to be a total and very wounding misrepresentation.

Whether sorrow for sin is consistent with the common doctrine of the orthodox.

You ask, (Appendix, 6,) "If sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, who can regard the commission of it with sorrow, or even regret?" To this I reply, that sorrow for sin is as consistent on the common principle, as on yours? You think that sin is incidental to the best moral system; that no moral beings could be preserved in holiness without the influence arising from it; and that God purposes its existence considered in this light. On this ground you are met by the opposer with the same objection, which you urge against the common doctrine. If sin is incidental to the best system, and if, without its influence, no moral beings could be preserved in holiness; who then, he says, can regard the commission of it with sorrow, or even with regret? "What benevolent being, duly informed, can ingenuously regret, that in sinning he has" done that which was incidental to the best moral system, and has put it into the power of God to produce an influence, without which he could not secure the holiness of any moral beings? Surely the act of sin, considered simply as incidental to the best system, and as having an influence so essential to the continued holiness of

moral beings, "is not a matter of regret," this being the very reason why God is supposed to "purpose it."

The difficulty too of reconciling sorrow for sin with the doctrine, *that God purposes its existence*, is as great on your scheme, as on the one you oppose. If, for any reasons whatever, God has purposed the existence of sin; why, the objector may say, should we regret its existence? Why not be satisfied with it for the very same reasons, which induced God to purpose it?

But I can see no real difficulty of this kind on either plan. And if by undue and misguided speculation, any one should so far obliterate the distinction between good and evil, as to regard them both in the same light, and with equal approbation, because God makes them both conduce to the same end; let an appeal be made to his moral nature, which, unless strangely perverted, must lead him to approve of what is right, and, in spite of any speculations to the contrary, to disapprove of what is wrong. Before any one could look upon it as "a matter of grateful praise that he had sinned," his conscience must be wholly subverted. And if any one should put your question, "If sin be the necessary means of the greatest good, who can reasonably regard the commission of it with sorrow or even regret;" I should think it sufficient to refer him to the law written on his heart.—Equally convincing must be an appeal from so baseless a speculation to the divine government. For what God forbids in his law, he punishes in his administration.—Now when the sinner feels, in his inmost soul, that sin is "an evil and bitter thing," and condemns it as "exceedingly sinful;" and when he finds his judgment of it confirmed by the word and providence of God; he will be in no danger of thinking it "a matter of grateful praise that he has committed it," even though he should be apprized that God will make it the means of the greatest good. The knowledge of the fact, that God will accomplish good by means of sin, could not in the least alter his judgment respecting its intrinsic nature.

If we would act like reasonable beings, we must regard sin as it is *in itself*. God regards it in this manner, as we learn from his law and government. First, he *forbids* it; then *punishes* it. As moral and accountable beings, we are to look upon sin, and are concerned with it, just as it is exhibited in God's law, and in his moral administration. And in both these it is exhibited, as unspeakably

criminal and hateful. The good secured comes not properly from *sin*, but from *God*; not from the sinner's act in *committing* it, but from God's act in *punishing* it; not from the *violation* of the law on man's part, but from the *vindication* of it on God's part. The fact that God accomplishes good by means of sin, is a matter of joy to all holy beings. But his agency in overruling sin for good is entirely different from the sinner's agency in committing it. The one is holy; the other is unholy; and they are thus, in their nature and tendency, totally opposite. So that we cannot approve of God's agency in accomplishing the good, without disapproving of the sinner's agency in committing the evil. If we love the good accomplished, we must abhor the sinful conduct which was intended to oppose it. And no ingenuous, unsophisticated mind could ever feel less sorrow for having transgressed the law, because he knew that it would be vindicated by its divine Author, and even honored the more by occasion of his transgression. The feelings of sorrow here mentioned must, I am sure, be acknowledged by all to be just and proper. And it must be equally just and proper that, from the depths of humiliation and penitential sorrow, we should lift up our eyes and admire the perfect government of God. When true believers see that he treats sin in such a manner, as to show its evil nature, and his infinite abhorrence of it; that by his administration, he not only prevents the hurtful consequences which would naturally flow from it, but makes it the means of good to the universe; they ought to feel, and do feel, a cordial approbation and pleasure. If we are holy, we shall forever rejoice in this benevolent, almighty government of God, without having our abhorrence of sin in the least diminished.

I cannot but think that the distinction above made is perfectly plain, between the agency of God in his righteous government, and the agency of man in his disobedience; between the good which directly results from God's perfect administration, and the evil which naturally results from sin. And to be consistent, and regard things as they are, we must approve of the conduct of God, which is holy, and disapprove of our own conduct, which is sinful; must rejoice in the one, and feel sorrow and shame for the other. Hence we perceive the obvious consistency of regret and sorrow for sin with the full persuasion that God will make use of it as the means of accomplishing the greatest good.

While speaking of the assumption which you oppose, and after remarking that the law of God, *according to this assumption*, is no proof, that transgression is not on the whole for the best ;" you say (Appendix, 7) ; " Indeed the subject" (the moral agent, the subject of law) " knows, that all sin will prove to be the necessary means of the greatest good ; how then does it appear, that with this knowledge he is not benevolent in performing the deed ?" To so strange a question as this, I hardly know how to frame a serious answer. The deed in question is by supposition a sinful one, performed, as you concede, with a selfish and sinful intention ; and yet you ask, " how it appears that the subject is not truly benevolent in performing it ;" which is equivalent to asking, how it appears that a man is not benevolent in performing a deed of malevolence. And this is nowise different from asking, how it appears that love is not hatred, that holiness is not sin, or that any one thing is not its opposite.—The action, I repeat it, is, by supposition, *selfish and sinful*, receiving its name from the intention with which it is performed. Now what is the reason which leads you to change the denomination of the action, and to speak of it as benevolent ? Is the nature of the action, or any one of its attributes changed ? No. Is the intention with which it was performed different ? No. What reason then do you assign for applying to a sinful deed, performed with a selfish intention, so unusual an epithet, as *benevolent* ? Why, " the subject is apprized of the utility of the deed," and this circumstance makes the difference. *A SELFISH deed, then, if only performed with the knowledge of its utility, may properly be denominated BENEVOLENT !*—a singular method of denominating moral actions ; according to which they would be called good or bad, benevolent or selfish, not from the intention with which they are performed, but from the knowledge which the agent has of their results ! This knowledge of the useful results of a sinful action seems in your view to infuse into it a certain quality, which counteracts the quality infused by the intention of the agent, and makes a benevolent deed of a selfish one. Yea, this knowledge of the results of a sinful action appears in your view to possess such wonderful virtue, that it transmutes the *intention itself*, with which the action is performed, from evil to good ; for you very soberly inquire, how it appears, that in this action, (this sinful action,) the agent "*did not really intend*

good ?—Why, methinks it appears from the fact, *that he really intended evil.*

The distinction between the wicked intention of sinners, and the benevolent intention of God to overrule their conduct for good, is exhibited in many examples mentioned in the Scriptures. Joseph said to his brethren, in reference to their envious and wicked conduct towards him, “As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good ;” Gen. 50: 20.

But this point may be illustrated in the most striking manner by *the crucifixion of Christ*. This was an event which God “determined before to be done,” and which he had clearly made known in his word as the appointed means of the highest glory to his name, and of the richest blessings to our race. And yet the act of those who crucified Christ, is represented as preeminently sinful. “With *wicked* hands they crucified the Son of God.” Of course, their conduct was, as Peter represented it, a proper subject of penitential sorrow.

Let me now state, very briefly, what would seem to be the fair results of your theory, when applied to this example. If I mistake not, you would be led by your views to say, that the crucifixion of Christ, being undoubtedly calculated for the greatest good of the universe, should have been made the subject of divine precept, and that his enemies should have been required to crucify him. If they were ignorant of the good to be accomplished by this event ; then you would say, the guilt of their sinful deed could not be great, being “occasioned by deception on the part of the Legislator,” who had neglected to inform them of the happy results of their conduct. And if they had understood, as they ought, what the Scriptures had revealed respecting the death of the Messiah as the necessary means of salvation to sinners, and so “had been fully apprized of the utility of the deed ;” then you would say, “with this knowledge, they must have been truly benevolent in performing the deed.” So far from suspecting that this knowledge would have roused their enmity the more, you would think that “their interest and duty would now have been coincident ;” that is, that they would not only have been instigated by their selfish interests, but bound in conscience, to crucify the Saviour. And finally, you would say, that the perpetrators of the death of Christ, when duly informed of the good to result from it, so far from feeling sorrow and regret, ought to make it

“a subject of grateful praise that they had committed this sin,” and “thus furnished the necessary means of the greatest good.” (Appendix, 3—7.)

Permit me to say, in conclusion, that I have no language to express what I feel in view of your remarks in this part of your note. If by any just explanation, they can be made consistent with the word of God, and with the common apprehensions of enlightened Christians, I shall sincerely rejoice.

LETTER VIII.

Practical influence of Dr. Taylor's theory compared with the common, in relation to the power of God, his blessedness, the system of his works, his dominion, the happiness of the good, submission, prayer, humility and dependence. Grounds of disquietude. Coincidence with Pelagians, Arminians, etc. What ought to be done. Suggestions. Particular things to be explained.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I do not consider it proper for me in this place particularly to remark upon the passages of Scripture, in which God offers eternal life to sinners, and solicits them to accept it. Although I am far from agreeing with you as to some of the inferences which you draw from these passages ; yet I maintain as fully as you do, the perfect sincerity of God in all the declarations he makes of his love, and compassion, and willingness to save ; and I deem it of great importance to the souls of men, that the obvious views of God's character, which are exhibited in the numerous passages referred to, should be most seriously and earnestly inculcated from the pulpit. These impressive and melting representations of the divine goodness, so often and so variously made in the Scriptures, I would hold fast for my own benefit, and exhibit for the benefit of others, though, in a speculative view, they were attended with far greater difficulties than they are.

Before closing, I have thought it proper to touch upon the practical influence of your opinions, compared with the common opinions of the Orthodox.

1. As to *divine power*. The common theory ascribes to God a power which is strictly infinite, and which enables him to do all his pleasure,—all which on the whole he chooses, or sees to be best.

But your theory, as we understand it, implies that there is a vast amount of good which God on the whole desires and chooses to effect, but which he cannot effect ;—that another system is supposeable, (a system free from evil,) which God greatly preferred to the present system, seeing it to be on the whole far better, which yet he could not adopt :—an obvious limitation of divine power.

2. *As to the divine blessedness.* The common theory represents God as perfectly and infinitely happy in the enjoyment of his own immutable excellence, and in the accomplishment of a good which will fully satisfy his unbounded benevolence. But according to your theory, a part of the good which God on the whole desires to accomplish, is not accomplished, and so his benevolence fails of being perfectly satisfied. Now if an intelligent being can be completely happy, who on the whole has strong desires which can never be satisfied, or who wishes to accomplish an amount of good which he never can accomplish ; then I know not what complete happiness is.

3. *As to the moral system.* The common theory implies, that God's system, considered in its whole extent and duration, is the best of all the systems of which his infinite mind conceived ; at least, that there was no conceivable system which he considered better than this. But if I understand your language, the highest honor which you bestow upon the system which God has adopted, is to assert, that God saw it to be better than no system at all ; while there were many systems conceivable, which should either be entirely free from evil, or have a less degree of it than the present, all of which were really better, and better in God's view, than the one he has adopted. Thus the common theory, seems to imply much more honorable conceptions of the system of God's works, than the theory which you have advanced.

4. *As to the extent of God's dominion.* It is the common belief of the Orthodox, that God's dominion is unlimited ; that he rules all things in heaven and earth, and directs all events ; that without doing the least violence to moral agency, he exercises a perfect control over the feelings and actions of moral agents ; that, although he is under no obligation to his creatures to preserve them in a state of holiness, or to make them holy if they are sinful, he can, whenever he on the whole chooses, sanctify the unholy, and preserve the holy ; and that there is nothing which can hinder him

from doing this universally, but the dictate of his own sovereign will, or, the determination of his own infinite and unsearchable wisdom respecting the great interests of his empire. But your theory, if I understand it, does not admit that God thus ruleth over all, and doeth all his pleasure. It represents God's control over moral agents, which is infinitely the most important part of his dominion, to be limited, so that he cannot influence them to do that which on the whole he wishes to influence them to do, and which he sees to be most for his glory and the good of the universe. It represents that the very nature, which God has given to moral agents, necessarily limits his voluntary power over them, and prevents him from giving such a direction to their moral actions as he wishes to give, and would give if he could. It will be easy for those who are accustomed to think, to determine whether these views or the common ones best accord with what the Bible teaches, as to the unlimited and uncontrollable dominion of God over the works of his hand, and particularly over moral agents.

5. As to *the happiness of the good*. It is the joy of Christians that God reigns, and reigns universally and forever; that he governs all things, especially in the moral world, after the counsel of his own will. But for them to admit that the operation of God's power is in any way restrained, except by his own perfect wisdom and goodness, or that his wise and holy sovereignty is by any cause whatever so limited, that he cannot accomplish what on the whole he wishes to accomplish, would damp their joy. Their feelings would agree with the feelings of God in preferring another plan to the present, and in regretting that the plan which was really and on the whole preferable, could not be adopted. It would be particularly distressing to them to indulge the thought, that the sovereign grace of God is so limited by free agency, that he cannot "have mercy on whom he will have mercy," and cannot turn sinners from the error of their ways, when it seems good in his sight.

6. As to *submission*. According to the common theory, entire submission to God is a reasonable and delightful duty. We know that God doeth all things well, because he doeth all his pleasure. Our submission is the submission of ignorance to infinite knowledge; of weakness to infinite power; of benevolence which is imperfect and feeble, to that which is perfect and boundless. Our submission is only a cheerful willingness, that all our affairs and

the affairs of the world should be conducted as unerring wisdom sees to be best. Submission on your scheme may have the same character with this, so far as the divine control extends, and events are ordered as God sees to be on the whole best. But beyond this, there is, on your scheme, a wide range, even the whole field of moral agency. Here our submission must be mingled with pain and regret ; because it is submission to a system, which God sees to be on the whole less desirable and excellent, than some other,—submission to an immeasurable evil, which God, all things considered, wishes to prevent, but cannot. Must not submission, regulated by such views, arise rather from an unwelcome necessity, than from choice ?

7. As to *prayer*. The common theory encourages us to make known our requests to God with great freedom, and with the assurance, that he is able to do all that we ask or think, and more ; and that he will grant us our petitions, if consistent with his infinite wisdom and goodness. But your theory would give this peculiarity to prayer, namely, that whenever we requested God to do any thing for us or for others, in the way of sanctifying the heart, and directing the moral affections and actions, we should feel that we were in danger of asking favors, which God had not power to bestow, however he might wish to bestow them. The difference between the two theories as to their practical influence in this respect, must be obvious to every Christian.

8. As to *humility* and *dependence on divine grace*. The common theory leads us to entertain low thoughts of ourselves, especially in a moral view, and to feel that we are not of ourselves sufficient for any thing spiritually good, and that, for whatever holiness we now possess, or may hereafter attain, we are dependent on divine grace ; and thus it prepares us for entire trust in God, for constant prayer, and fervent gratitude. But your theory, which asserts so continually and in terms so emphatical, the doctrine of human power, even, as it would seem, at the expense of the doctrine of divine power, is likely, if I mistake not, to produce a very different effect. In the representations which you and others make on this subject, and which are, in language at least, at variance with the Scriptures, I cannot but apprehend a tendency to cherish in the heart a feeling of independence and self-sufficiency. Would it not be natural for us to ask, why we should seek that help of God, which is not necessary, and without which we are able to work out our own

salvation, and have in ourselves a sufficiency for all the purposes of a holy life? I do not charge you or those who adopt your theory, with having feelings of this kind yourselves, or with designedly promoting them in others, nor even with having any views in your own minds, which would naturally lead to such a consequence. And I would by no means have you infer from any remarks I have made, that I differ at all from the generality of ministers in New England respecting the natural powers and faculties of man, as a moral and accountable being, a proper subject of law. But the unqualified language which you sometimes employ respecting the natural state, the free will and the power of man, the nature and necessity of divine influence, the manner of regeneration, and other points allied to these, is not, I apprehend, in accordance either with the letter or the spirit of revelation, and will have an unpropitious influence upon the characters of men, upon revivals of religion, and upon all the interests of the church. But on these subjects I would not enlarge in this place, as I have intended to give my views respecting them more fully in another way.

But my Brother, you cannot surely think it strange, that serious disquietude and alarm should exist among us in consequence of what you have published in relation to these subjects. For you well know that Calvinists, though not afraid of free discussion, are sincerely and firmly attached to their articles of faith, and are not apt to be carried about with the changing opinions of others. Whether right or wrong, we have been accustomed to consider the controversy which early arose in the church between the Orthodox and Pelagians, and which, after the Reformation, was continued between the Lutherans and Calvinists on one side, and the Arminians or Remonstrants on the other, as of radical importance. Now how would you expect us to feel, and, with our convictions, how ought we to feel, when a brother, who has professed to be decidedly orthodox, and has had our entire confidence, and is placed at the head of one of our Theological Schools, makes an attack upon several of the articles of our faith, and employs language on the subject of moral agency, free will, depravity, divine influence, etc. which is so like the language of Arminians and Pelagians, that it would require some labor to discover the difference? And how would it be natural for us to feel, when such a brother adopts, on several controverted subjects, the language and the opinions which have been

adopted by Unitarians; and when we find that Unitarians themselves understand him as agreeing with them, and are making such agreement a subject of exultation? Would it not betray an indifference and remissness in us, which you would think unaccountable, if such things excited no solicitude in us respecting the cause which ought ever to be dearest to our hearts? And shall I ask again, how would you expect us to feel, and with our dread of error, how ought we to feel, when we find a remarkable resemblance between your mode of thinking on one of the subjects of the present discussion, and that of free thinkers? Rousseau says,* “If man is active and free, he acts of himself.—Providence does not hinder him from doing evil, either because the evil which so feeble a being as man can perform, is nothing in his eyes, or because he could not hinder it without restraining our liberty, and thus doing a greater evil, by degrading our nature.—We are placed upon the earth, and endowed with liberty, tempted by passion, and restrained by conscience. What more could divine power itself do for us? Could it put contradiction in our nature, and pay the price of well-doing to one who had not been able to do ill? What! in order to prevent man from being wicked, must God confine him to instinct, and make him a beast?” This eloquent writer says in another place;† “Man, be patient. The evils you suffer are a necessary effect of nature. The eternal and beneficent Being would have been glad to exempt you from them.—The reason why he has not done better, is, that he *could* not.”—Again.—“Why wish to vindicate the divine power at the expense of the divine goodness?” And again. “The question is not, whether we do or do not suffer; but whether it was well for the universe to exist, and whether the ills which we endure are not inevitable to its constitution.”

I have not adverted to this noticeable agreement in phraseology, and in reasoning between you and those I have mentioned, for the purpose of stigmatizing your theory, or as a proof that it is erroneous. For Rousseau might have, and, in many respects, evidently had very just conceptions on moral and religious subjects. And so had the Pelagians and Arminians. But when we find you, on several interesting points, siding with these sects against the Orthodox, and siding too with Dr. John Taylor against Edwards on some of

* Confession of faith in “Emile.”

† Letter to Voltaire respecting his poem on the destruction of Lisbon.

the main questions at issue between them ; and when in addition to this, we find you on some points coinciding so nearly with the views of the French philosophers, and, shall I say, on other points throwing out the very objections, which we have so often heard from cavillers against orthodoxy ; it would certainly be strange, if none of our sensibilities were touched, and no concern or fear excited within us in regard to the tendency of your speculations. I acknowledge that on this whole subject we may be mistaken ; and that our fear may be groundless. And we will be anxiously looking for evidence to satisfy us that it is so. To such evidence we will open every avenue to our understandings and hearts. But I feel myself constrained to say, that the theory which you adopt in contradistinction to the common theory, appears to me, generally, so far as I understand it, to be unscriptural, and of dangerous tendency. And the more I examine it, the farther I am from being satisfied with it. And this is the case with the Orthodox community to an extent, as I have reason to think, far beyond your apprehension. Compared with the whole body of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers, there are very few, who embrace your opinions ; and, though my knowledge may be defective, yet among all the Professors of our Theological Seminaries, and Presidents of our Colleges, I do not know of one, whose views coincide with yours. But although such has been the case with me and with my brethren in the sacred office generally, we have been slow, perhaps too slow, to make a public declaration of our dissent. So far have we been from acting the part of *assailants*, that we have been very reluctant to come even to the work of *self-defence*. The attack which you have made upon our faith, and the common faith of the Reformed churches in Europe and America, it might have been expected we should instantly endeavour to repel. But of any forwardness on our part to do this, you cannot complain ; least of all can you complain of this in me. I have waited to learn what God would have me to do ; and to have the path of duty made plain. I have waited to see whether the counsels and entreaties of some of your most valued and intimate friends would have any influence to check your ardor, and restrain you from what I considered hazardous to the peace of the churches. I have waited also to obtain more light concerning your opinions, and have hoped that the difference between you and your brethren would prove to be rather in appearance, than in reality, and that the necessity of controversy might

still be avoided. In the mean time, you and your associates have been intent upon your object, and by preaching, and conversation, and pamphlets, and especially by a popular Periodical, have been zealously laboring to propagate your tenets. At length, in conformity with the wishes of many, far and near, I have been induced to unite with those respected ministers who have preceded me, not, be it remembered, in making an attack upon you, as has been very incautiously said, but in repelling your attack upon us and our brethren, and in defending our common and long established faith against what we conceive to be innovation and error. I most heartily regret the introduction of a controversy, which may turn off the minds of many from the great interests of religion, fill our churches with strife, and hinder the spread of the gospel. But for the evils of such a controversy, who is to be responsible?

Excuse me, Dear Brother, for the length of these Letters, and for the freedom with which I have addressed you. If I have shown any want of fairness, or of brotherly love, or have done the least thing which can be a just cause of offence to you or to others, I shall remember it with sorrow and shame. If, after all the efforts I have made, I have misapprehended the true sense of the passages in your sermon, to which I have attended; I shall hope for such explanation from you, as will effectually correct my mistake. And you will keep in mind that the mistake, if there is one, exists among your readers extensively. Do you not owe it then to the public, to give a clear, unambiguous, and full exhibition of the peculiarities of your system, so that there may no longer be any complaint of obscurity, or any suspicion of concealment? If it be true that your system agrees with that of Edwards and Dwight, and New England ministers generally; the public should be satisfied of this. Or if a new system is to be introduced, and a new sect formed, with a new name, and new measures to extend itself, and a new and separate interest; then the public ought to have the means of understanding exactly what the new system is, and what is to be the new sect. The difficulty lies not at all between you and me, personally, but between you and the Christian community. And if you will in any way satisfy them, that you do not entertain the views which have been imputed to you; if you will satisfy them, that you agree in your doctrinal belief, as you profess to do, with Edwards and Dwight; I and others shall have nothing more to do, but to testify our joy,

that our mistake has been corrected, and our entire confidence in you restored ; and so the whole matter may come at once to a happy termination.

But in order to bring about this happy result, there is evidently something for you to do. And it is my prayer to the God of truth, that whatever you may undertake with a view to such a result, you may have his gracious presence and assistance. And as I have an utter dislike to controversy, especially with a beloved brother, and shall wish to have no further occasion to turn aside from the important and delightful duties of my office to pursue this discussion ; I will here, in this closing Letter, open my heart to you without any reserve, not to dictate to you, or bring forward any demands, but to make a few requests, and to suggest what I think the interests of religion require of you, and of every other man, engaged in a public discussion like this, and what the Christian community in the present case will feel themselves entitled to expect.

In the *first* place, permit me to say a word in regard to the symptoms of excitement which you have shown, and your readiness, and that of your associates, to make complaints against those from whom you differ. I beg you to look, a moment, at the case, just as it is. An individual comes forward to express his dissent from several doctrines, which have always been held sacred by the churches of the Reformation, especially by the orthodox in this country. Now in what manner should we naturally expect him to proceed ? We might look for a manly freedom, and even boldness, in the declaration of his opinions ; and this might entitle him to our respect ; but should we look for expressions of uncandidness and severity towards his brethren ? We might expect him to state the reasons of his own belief clearly and strongly. But should we expect a forwardness in him to bring complaints against those who still maintained the common doctrines, and to assault them with other weapons, than sober argument, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ? These common doctrines, it is well known, are very dear to those who believe them, being intimately associated with their most devout affections, their hopes, and their joys. Could it be supposed that they would readily give them up, as things of no value ? Could it be expected, that the sons of the Puritans would quickly surrender to a single assailant those precious truths, which had been so often defended against the attacks of an host ? I beseech you, my Brother, to review

this matter as it has been from the beginning, and consider whether you have not, in some respects, erred in judgment, been too hasty in your proceedings, too confident of success, and too impatient of contradiction ; and whether you have not assumed an attitude before the public, not altogether befitting you ? In such circumstances, ought not every man to take care to cherish and exhibit great caution and candor, forbearance and gentleness ? I hope you will pardon me for saying what many have thought, but few perhaps would be likely to express.

Secondly. As you have been charged with being so unintelligible, and readers generally have found it so difficult to understand what your theory is ; we wish you to aim at great plainness and perspicuity, and to make every thing you write as intelligible as possible.

Thirdly. As there is a pretty extensive impression, that you have gone beyond what propriety would admit in your professions of agreement with Calvinistic writers, and particularly that you have made quotations from the writings of Edwards and Dwight in the manner of one who has a favorite point to carry, and that your reasoning has too much the appearance of what is called *special pleading* ; it would seem very desirable that in what you have further to say on this point, you should be sure to exhibit perfect fairness and impartiality. And here permit me to say, that the statements made in No. 6 of " VIEWS IN THEOLOGY," will demand your particular consideration. Many of your brethren will be somewhat impatient to see your reply to the reasoning found in that pamphlet.

Fourthly. I well know that a man with a mind as active as yours, as adroit in controversy, and urged on by as powerful an impulse, can write as much and as long as he chooses on any subject, especially on such a subject as this. But it will naturally be a question with you and with me, how much time men who are busy in their callings, will think proper to take from other duties, to examine such matters as these. Now instead of carrying this discussion into a great variety of pamphlets and Reviews, and spreading it out over a long period of time, will it not be advisable for you, the next time you write, to make thorough work, and in one publication, honored with your name, to bring out the whole to public view ?

As to the subjects of discussion introduced in these Letters, I hope you will take care not to overlook the main points. Whatever labor you may bestow upon smaller things, be careful not to pass by

those which are of primary importance. You will excuse me, if I mention some of these, and suggest to you what I suppose to be necessary, on your part, to meet the circumstances of the case, and the wishes of the community.

As to the two positions, then, which you call "common but groundless assumptions," I wish to ask, what you take to be real sentiments which your brethren mean to express by these positions; and whether you deny them in the sense in which they affirm them; or if not, in what sense you do deny them; and whether you hold the opposite; or if not, whether your belief really stops with the mere negation of the common belief?

In regard to the second position, my question is, whether your theory implies, that God could have prevented all sin, or the present degree of it? The question relates to moral agents actually existing; and to answer it by saying, yes, God could have prevented all sin, or the present degree of it.....by not giving existence to moral beings,—would be a mere shuffle. According to your theory, was God able to prevent sin in the literal sense, (which is the first sense I have given of power;) that is, was he able to do it, if on the whole he had chosen to do it?

As you appear to hold that God *could not* prevent sin, in the third sense I have given, will you inform us wherein you suppose the impossibility or absurdity consists? also, whether you consider it impossible or absurd in all cases alike for God to prevent sin? and if not; then what makes the difference? And if the prevention of sin is impossible in this sense, that is, absurd and contradictory; then in what sense is such prevention of sin an object of God's desire or choice?

Will you inform us definitely what you mean by the *nature of things*, and in what sense and degree you suppose the power of God limited by it?

As the nature of moral agency is much concerned with this discussion; will you give us your views of it very particularly? Do you consider it to be such, that it is wholly or in part beyond the power of God to direct and control it as he chooses? If you say, partly, but not wholly; then tell us why it is not as really an infringement upon moral agency, for God to control it in part, as wholly? If you hold that God cannot control moral agency in all cases, though he can in some; then, why not in all, as well as in

some? Also, how far does God direct events in the natural, social, and civil world?

You will gratify us by showing very clearly and particularly, what that is in the nature of moral agents, which you suppose makes it impossible for God to form their characters and direct their actions according to his own pleasure? Is it any particular faculty, or attribute; or their whole nature taken in one general view?

If God can exert no influence on the minds of men, except by rational motives, can he make that influence effectual to sway their hearts, whenever he pleases?

We shall wish to know, whether your theory implies, as many have supposed it does, that God has so made moral agents that they are *independent* of him, as to their moral feelings and actions? If you hold that moral agents, as such, are dependent on God; then, how far, and in what respects are they so?

As this discussion is intimately connected with the doctrine of divine influence; we shall be gratified to know what your theory is in respect to that doctrine. You speak of the influence of the Spirit in regeneration, as supernatural. Will you inform us in what sense you use the word, supernatural? why such influence is necessary? and whether the Spirit of God in regeneration has a direct influence on the mind itself?

As many have understood you, as agreeing substantially with the Pelagians, and particularly with Dr. John Taylor, in regard to the natural state of man, free will, and conversion; will you inform us whether and how far this is the case?

And as many have doubted whether you maintain the doctrine of divine decrees and divine sovereignty in the sense in which it is commonly maintained by the Orthodox; will you inform us on this subject?

Is your theory of moral agency the same as that which Edwards maintained in his treatise on the Will?

I have understood you as holding, that God could not have done better than he has for any individual moral agent, and of course that he could not have converted any more sinners, than he has converted. Have I understood you right? If God pleased, and saw it to be on the whole best, could he convert any one, and everyone, who is not converted? If not; what is the hindrance? And is that hindrance greater here, than has in other instances been overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit?

If you see faults in the reasoning in Letter VI, or if you suppose that you have been misunderstood on the points there discussed; you will particularly inform us.—Could God, according to your theory, preserve any of his creatures in a state of holiness, without the influence arising from the existence and punishment of sin?

Does your theory imply that the only choice which God had, was between the present moral system, including so much evil, and no moral system at all? or does it admit that there might have been other systems, and some of them excluding all evil, which were conceived by the mind of God, to which he preferred the present system?

As the subjects treated of in Letter VII, are of a practical nature, I hope you will express your views of them with all possible plainness, not overlooking the questions found in the paragraph beginning at the lower part of p. 87. The same as to the several articles in the present Letter, in which I have shown what I apprehend to be the natural influence of your theory, compared with the common one.

But it will be quite unnecessary for me to go over the whole ground of the discussion in order to show what I consider to be the main points. You will see what they are, and will doubtless notice them. And I earnestly hope, that you will do all in your power to remove the dissatisfaction and disquietude of your brethren far and near, and to allay their honest fears in regard to the nature and consequences of your speculations.

In replying to these Letters, you may be able to fix upon me the charge of some inadvertencies, faults in reasoning, and misconceptions of your theory. So be it. I make no claim to infallibility, especially on subjects encumbered with an obscure and ambiguous phraseology, and in some respects involved in deep mystery; and I am much farther from making such a claim, than I was twenty years ago.

But in regard to the subjects now under discussion, it is my earnest wish no longer to remain in the dark, and no longer to be in danger of contending in the dark.—That the common faith of the Orthodox is substantially conformed to the word of God, and will stand fast forever, I have no doubt. On the other hand, I have no doubt that in my habits of thinking and reasoning on every moral and religious subject, there is more or less of

darkness and error remaining. And if you, my Brother, or any other man, by a clear explanation of the Scriptures, or by an exhibition of just thought, or of powerful, conclusive argument, will do any thing towards chasing away this darkness and error from my mind, and helping me better to understand divine truth; I will regard it as one of the choicest blessings that can be derived from the benevolent agency of man. *Truth is from God, and is ordained to be forever the sustenance and the joy of his saints.* Let us then put away all prejudice, and pride, and every hurtful passion, and unite our hearts in the fervent prayer, that the Holy Spirit may be our teacher, and that, whatever may become of this discussion, or of the particular opinions which such short-sighted, erring creatures as we are may have wished to defend, *what God sees to be truth, may prevail.*

I am, Reverend and Dear Sir, with sincere affection and esteem, your brother,

LEONARD WOODS.

Theological Seminary,
Andover, July 30, 1830.

APPENDIX.

CONCIO AD CLERUM, pp. 23—34.

“The universal depravity of mankind is not inconsistent with the moral perfection of God. It is not uncommon to ask, (and I admit the facts on which the objection rests)—how could a God of perfect sincerity and goodness bring a race of creatures into existence, and give them such a *nature* that they will all certainly sin and incur his wrath?—It is also added, to increase the weight of the objection,—why render this universal sinfulness of a race, the consequence of one man’s act—why not give to each a fair trial for himself? I answer, God does give to each a fair trial for himself. Not a human being does or can become thus sinful or depraved but by his own choice. God does not compel him to sin by the *nature* he gives him. Nor is his sin, although a consequence of Adam’s sin, in such a sense its consequence, as not to be a free voluntary act of his own. He sins freely, voluntarily. There is no other way of sinning. God, (there is no irreverence in saying it,) can make nothing else sin, but the sinner’s act.

1. Do you then say, that God gave man a nature, which he knew would lead him to sin?—What if He did?—Do you know that God could have done better, better on the whole or better, if he gave him existence at all, *even for the individual himself*? The error lies in the gratuitous assumption, that God could have adopted a moral system, and prevented all sin, or at least, the present degree of sin. For, no man knows this—no man can prove it. The assumption therefore is wholly unauthorised as the basis of the present objection, and the

objection itself groundless. On the supposition that the evil which exists is in respect to divine prevention, *incidental* to the best possible system, and that notwithstanding the evil, God will secure the greatest good possible to him to secure, who can impeach either his wisdom or his goodness because evil exists? I say then that as ignorance is incompetent to make an objection, and as no one knows that this supposition is not a matter of fact, no one has a right to assert the contrary, or even to think it.* Suppose then God had adopted a different system, who is competent to foretell or to conjecture the results,—or even the results of one iota of change in the present system? Suppose God had made you just like Adam or even like Lucifer, and placed you in similar circumstances, do you know that you would not have sinned as he did? How do you know that had you commenced your immortal career with such aggravated guilt, God would not have found it necessary to send you to hell without an offer of mercy, and that you would not have sunk in deeper woe than that which now awaits you?—How do you know that what might have been true respecting yourself, had not been true of any other possible system of accountable beings? How do you know, that had God ordered things otherwise than he has, this very world now cheered with the calls of mercy and brightened with the hopes of eternal life, yea that heaven itself would not now be trembling under the thunders of retributive vengeance? Man,—man in his ignorance, alter the plan and procedure of his God! How dare he think of it? Beware, ye insects of a day, ye are judging HIM “whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.”

“Now think of this, fellow sinner. God in adopting the present system with all the sin incidental to it, may have adopted the best possible. In giving to you the nature which he has, and in placing you in the circumstances in which he has, he may have done the best he could even for you.”

* Note. The difficulties on this difficult subject as it is extensively regarded, result in the view of the writer from two very common but groundless assumptions—assumptions which so long as they are admitted and reasoned upon, *must* leave the subject involved in insuperable difficulties.

2. The assumptions are these; First, *that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, and as such, so far as it exists, is preferable on the whole to holiness in its stead.* Secondly, *that God could in a moral system have prevented all sin, or at least the present degree of sin.*

In further explanation of the ground taken in answering the above objection, the following enquiries are submitted to the consideration of the candid.

3. Is not the assumption that the degree of sin which exists, or even any degree of sin, is on the whole preferable to holiness in its stead, inconsistent alike with the benevolence and the sincerity of God?—With his benevolence. If such be the nature of God, of man, of holiness, of sin, of all things, that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good, ought it not to be made the subject of precept—would it not be, by a benevolent moral Governor? For how can it be consistent with the benevolence of a moral governor, to require of his subjects that moral conduct which is not on the whole for the best?

4. If it be said that it is on the whole for the best that *he* should *require* it, but not on the whole for the best that *they* should *perform* it—what is this but to say that it is on the whole for the best that he should practise deception on his subjects? And what then becomes of his *sincerity*?—Let us take an example or two. Who would regard the command of a parent as *sincere*, it being known that he prefers on the whole the disobedience of the child to his obedience? Who would regard the invitation of a friend as *sincere*, being fully apprised that he prefers on the whole its rejection to its acceptance?—If it be said that no subjects of God have such knowledge of God's preference of sin to holiness in their own case, then the question is whether their ignorance alters the *fact*; and whether he is truly *sincere*, when he would be justly pronounced *insincere* if the *real fact* were known?—Besides, after the commission of sin, the fact of such a preference, if there be one, is known. How then does the *sincerity* of God appear, when it is placed beyond a doubt by the event, that he did prefer on the whole, the sin committed by the subject to the holiness required in his law?—Is it then possible that God should be sincere in his commands and invitations, unless holiness in man be on the whole preferable to sin in its stead?

5. Further, it is extensively maintained that virtue is founded in utility, i. e. that such is the nature, relations and tendencies of things, that greater happiness will result from virtue or holiness than from vice or sin. How then can sin in the nature of things be the necessary means of the greatest good?

6. Again, if sin be *the necessary means* of the greatest good, who can reasonably regard the commission of it with sorrow or even regret? What benevolent being duly informed, can ingenuously regret that by sin he has put it in the power of God to produce greater good, than God could otherwise produce? Ought it not rather to be matter of grateful praise that he has sinned, and thus furnished, by what he has done, the necessary means of the greatest possible good? Surely the act considered simply in the relation of the necessary means of such an end, is not a matter for regret; this being the very reason, why God himself is supposed to prefer it.

7. Is it then said, that *the intention* is selfish and sinful? Be it so. Had the subject however been fully apprised of the utility of the deed, and the real preference of God, (as in the case of the destruction of the Canaanites,) his own interest and his duty would have been coincident; and how does it appear that in this case he had not performed the act from a *benevolent* intention? And how great is the guilt of a selfish intention which, for aught that appears,

is occasioned by deception on the part of the lawgiver? Is it said that the selfish intention is necessary to the action as the means of good? But where is an instance in which the good educed from a sinful action is dependent on the selfish intention of the agent? Is it said, that otherwise God could not shew mercy in its forgiveness? Does God then deceive his subjects in regard to the true nature and tendency of moral acts, and thus occasion their sin that he may have the glory of forgiving it? Is this the glory of his mercy? Besides, how does it appear that the subject did not really *intend* good? The law of God, according to the assumption, is no proof that transgression is not on the whole for the best; indeed the subject knows that all sin will prove to be the necessary means of the greatest good; how then does it appear that with this knowledge he was not truly benevolent in performing the deed? What reason then for sorrow or regret remains?

The second assumption now claims our notice; viz. *that God could have prevented all sin, or at least the present degree of sin, in a moral system.*

8. If holiness in a moral system be preferable on the whole to sin in its stead, why did not a benevolent God, were it possible to him, prevent all sin, and secure the prevalence of universal holiness? Would not a moral universe of perfect holiness, and of course of perfect happiness, be happier and better than one comprising sin and its miseries? And must not infinite benevolence accomplish all the good it can? Would not a benevolent God then, *had it been possible to him in the nature of things*, have secured the existence of universal holiness in his moral kingdom?

9. Is the reader startled by an enquiry which seems to limit the power of God? But does not *he* equally limit the power of God by supposing, or rather affirming, that God COULD NOT secure the greatest good without the existence of sin? On either supposition there is what may be called a limitation of the power of God by *the nature of things*. In one case, the limitation is supposed to result from the nature of sin; in the other, from *the nature of moral agency*. If then one of these suppositions *must* be made, which is the most honorable to God?

10. Further, does not he who is startled by this supposition, limit *the goodness* of God? Undeniably he does, if it be conceded that holiness is on the whole preferable to sin in its stead. For he who admits this, and maintains that God *could* have secured the existence of holiness instead of sin, must also admit that God is not good enough to accomplish all the good in his power; not good enough to prevent the worst of evils.—And who does most reverence to God, he who supposes that God *would* have prevented all sin in his moral universe, but *could* not, or he who affirms that he *could* have prevented it, but *would* not? Or is it more honorable to God to suppose that such is the nature of sin, that he *could not* accomplish the highest good without it, than to suppose that such is the nature of *free agency* that God *could not* wholly prevent its perversion?

11. But the main enquiry on this point remains,—does the supposition that God could not prevent sin in a moral system, limit his power at all? To suppose or affirm that God cannot perform what is *impossible in the nature of things*, is not properly to limit his power. Is there then the least particle of evidence,

that the entire prevention of sin in moral beings is possible to God in the nature of things? If not, then what becomes of the very common assumption of such possibility?

12. All evidence of the truth of this assumption must be derived either from *the nature of the subject*, or from *known facts*. Is there such evidence from *the nature of the subject*? It is here to be remarked, that the prevention of sin by any influence that destroys the *power to sin*, destroys moral agency. Moral agents then must possess the *power to sin*. Who then can prove *a priori* or from the nature of the subject, that *a being who CAN sin, will NOT sin*? How can it be proved *a priori* or from the nature of the subject, that a thing *will not be*, when for aught that appears, it *may be*? On this point, is it presumptuous to bid defiance to the powers of human reason?

13. Is there any evidence from *facts*? Facts, so far as they are known to us, furnish no support to the assumption, that God could in a moral system prevent all sin, or even the present degree of sin. For we know of no creature of God, whose holiness is secured without that influence which results either directly or indirectly, from the existence of sin and its punishment. How then can it be shown *from facts*, that God could secure any of his moral creatures in holiness, without this influence; or to what purpose is it to allege instances of the prevention of sin *under* this influence, to prove that God could prevent it *without* this influence? Rather, do not all known facts furnish a strong presumption to the contrary? *If God could prevent all sin without this influence, why has he not done it?* Be this however as it may, since God has not, so far as we know, prevented sin in a single instance without this influence, how can it be proved *from facts*, that he could have prevented all sin, or even the present degree of sin in a moral system? *Had his creatures done what they could, then indeed there had been more holiness and less sin.* But the question is, *what could God have done to secure such a result?* Had he prevented the sins of one human being to the present time, or had he brought to repentance one sinner more than he has, who can prove that the requisite interposition for the purpose, would not result in a vast increase of sin in the system, including even the apostacy and augmented guilt of that individual? In a word, who is competent to foretell, or authorised even to *surmise* the consequences of the least iota of change in the present system of influence to produce holiness and prevent sin? If no one, then all assumptions on the subject, like that under consideration, are wholly unwarranted. It may be true, that God will secure under the present system of things, the greatest degree of holiness and the least degree of sin, which *it is possible to him in the nature of things* to secure. Neither the *nature of the subject*, nor *known facts*, furnish a particle of evidence to the contrary. The assumption therefore, that God could in a moral system have prevented all sin, or the present degree of sin, is wholly gratuitous and unauthorised, and *ought never to be made the basis of an objection or an argument.*


14. As an apology for this note, the writer would say that the objection alluded to in the discourse, so commonly rises in the mind in connexion with the subject, that it was thought proper to notice it; and while he knows of no refutation except the one given, he was desirous of attempting still further to

free the subject from distressing and groundless perplexity. This is done in his own view, simply by dismissing from the mind the two assumptions which have been examined. The mode in which the mind will in this way, be led to view the character and government of God may, it is believed, be shown to be free from embarrassment by an example.

15. Suppose then the father of several sons to have foreknown with minute accuracy the various propensities and tendencies of their nature, and *all the possible* conditions or circumstances in which he might place them, with all the results of each condition. Suppose him also to foresee with absolute certainty, that to place them at a public seminary, although he knows it will be, unavoidably to himself, attended with a temporary course of vice on their part, will nevertheless result in greater good than he can secure by placing them in any *other* condition or circumstances. Suppose it to be true, and known to him, that their uniform good conduct at the seminary would be far better on the whole or in every respect than their misconduct. Suppose him now to send them at the proper age, to the place of their education with solemn and unqualified injunctions of uniform good conduct; and all the results to be as foreseen.—Now can the procedure of this father be impeached in any respect whatever? Does he not evince wisdom and benevolence in every part of it? Does he not evince the most absolute and perfect sincerity in his injunctions of right conduct? Does he not at the same time furnish by what *he* does, adequate and decisive ground for acquiescence in view of the incidental evil; and is there not equally decisive ground for repentance to his disobedient children in what *they* do? If these things are so in the procedure of this father, why are they not so in the procedure of God?

16. The writer hopes he shall not be charged *without proof*, with denying what he fully believes—that the providential purposes or decrees of God extend to all actual events, sin not excepted. God may really purpose the existence of sin, whether he purpose it for one reason or for another; he may, as the example shows, as really purpose sin though wholly an evil, considered as *incidental*, so far as his power of prevention is concerned, to the best moral system, as purpose it considered as so excellent in its nature and relations as to be the necessary means of the greatest good. And while the theory now proposed exhibits the providential government of God as the basis of submission, confidence, and joy, under all the evils that befall his dependent creatures; it also presents, as no other theory in the view of the writer does present, the Moral Government of God in its unimpaired perfection and glory, to deter from sin and allure to holiness his accountable subjects.

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